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Blacksmith of God

BLACKSMITH OF GOD

by P. E. Breton, O.M.I.

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J. MORABITO, O.M.I.
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† Anthony JORDAN, O.M.I.
Coadjutor Archbishop
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PREFACE

In 1918 I arrived at St. John's College, Edmonton, to begin my studies as a "junior" Oblate. Among the Oblates I came to know there, was a little one-armed lay-brother, modest somewhat weather bitten in appearance, who seemed to possess the gift of being ubiquitous. He was to be found everywhere, in the corridors, in the recreation room, in the garden, in the laundry, always happy and busily engaged in many tasks. I soon learned his name — Brother Anthony; no one ever used his surname: Kowalczyk.

When I saw him in the chapel he seemed to be another person. On his knees, beside « his pillar », lost in meditation, he appeared to be living in another world, and to be present here below in body only. Just the sight of this humble religious at prayer was an inspiration to us all.

As time went on I came to know him better — the religious model, the man of God, whose warm and simple piety was charming and winning. Child-like candor shone from the countenance of this prodigious manual-worker. His whole being exhaled virtue and he impressed us so much that we "Juniors" instinctively confided in him. We, young boys, went to him with our needs — spiritual as well as material, —

asking his assistance and begging the powerful intercession of his prayers. This was especially true at examination time when Brother Anthony's clients were more numerous than usual. His welcome was always affable and he always promised to you what was asked — on one condition — one must say an "Ave" and light a lamp before the statue of the Blessed Virgin.

Devotion to Our Lady is common enough among Catholics, especially among Priests and Brothers and Sisters, but Brother Anthony's devotion to his heavenly Mother was exceptional. Every one who ever knew him would bear this witness to what was indeed the very breath of his soul. This intense devotion which he acquired very young in the bosom of his family in his native Poland, Brother Anthony fostered until his dying day. How many thousands of "Aves" and rosaries he must have offered during his earthly sojourn! With what love he spoke of his Good Mother! Along with his "Aves" he delighted to have little lamps lighted before her altar. It was to honor the Blessed Virgin that he erected, toward the end of his life, a Grotto on the grounds of St. John's College. It is very difficult to give adequate expression to his ever-present love and for his confidence in Mary. This example may give some idea of it: The College car became mired in the mud one afternoon and Brother Anthony was called upon to help to push it out. On arriving at the place, he immediately knelt down in the mud to say an "Ave" and only after that, did he help to push the car out. This was characteristic of him.

Who can say what profound influence Brother Anthony had, especially during the 36 years that he spent at St. John's College. No young "Junior" went without a word of consolation in time of need. Many present-day Oblates owe their vocation to him. He was not only an inspiration for the generations of students who lived at St. John's College during these 36 years, but he was also a model for his brethren in religious life and an example for all Christians wishing to prepare themselves better for the next life.

The reader of this book will quickly realize that the means used by Brother Anthony to cultivate a saintly life was through the faithful, one might even say perfect, performance of any menial tasks. He walked the way of humility and offered everything he did as an expression of love for God and as an expression of deep and filial devotion to Mary.

In our material world so attached to the baubles of this life, Brother Anthony preaches to us in silence — but with what eloquence! — the true values of this life, the "one thing necessary" toward which the lives of all Christians ought to be directed.

May the message of Brother Anthony reach all.

Anthony JORDAN, O.M.I.
Coadjutor Archbishop of Edmonton.

Edmonton, Alberta,
June 30, 1959.

INTRODUCTION

"The final cross a saint must bear," someone has written, "is often that prepared for him by his biographer." More than once I had occasion to recall this remark while I was busy with the present subject.

It is so easy to disfigure a saint, to read into his life too much of what is conventionally assumed to be a sign of sanctity. The "Lives of Saints" are full of such recitals.

In bestowing on Brother Anthony Kowalczyk the title "Blacksmith" I have desired to show in relief the human side of his life. Leaving school very young, Anthony became a blacksmith, and continued to do this work a bit all through his life, even under the habit of a coadjutor Brother.

I wanted above all to point out the strength of his soul. This humble lay Brother was far from developing a sentimental devotion. He had a harsh spiritual existence, which we may compare to that of a blacksmith. He fought and he suffered. His soul was forged by sacrifices, ordeals and self denials.

Finally — a symbolic detail, or should I say a portend of his life — his name "Kowalczyk" signifies in Polish "The Son of a Blacksmith".

Is anything else needed for our Brother Anthony to merit the title "Blacksmith of God"?

P.E.B.

CHAPTER I

THE LAND OF THE WHITE EAGLE

During the early hours of a morning in June, 1866, a two-horse carriage jogged along the road to the Shrine of Lutogniew. The village of Dzierzanow, Poland, lay asleep. The sun's first rays probed the birch and linden trees that lined the road. The passengers laughed and smiled, glancing often at the newly-born baby, bundled in white, on his way to the parish church to be baptized.

As the horses moved past a large cross in the village outskirts, the passengers instinctively blessed themselves. They passed carefully cultivated rows of sugar beets and potatoes in the sunbathed countryside. This was the rich Poznan district. The farmers were already hard at work. Many of them had risen long before sunrise to begin the day's labors.

Everyone had heard the good news about the birth of Lucy Kowalczyk's sixth child. Now the workers recognized the carriage and paused momentarily to wave as it hurried by. The horses pulled up

in front of the church. Ignatius Kowalczyk tied the team to a hitching rail while the God-parents carried the baby inside.

Following the Mass, the parish priest warmly greeted the group. He placed the end of the stole on the small baby's shoulder to lead him with his God-parents into the baptistry for the life-giving ceremony. Tiny Anthony Kowalczyk was born to the life of grace under the watchful eyes of Mary, Comforter of the Afflicted.

Unlike the baby who slept, unconcerned with what was happening, Poland, itself, was a more restless child. She was in the midst of another turbulent chapter of a tragic history which dated back to a forgotten era. Poland was the link and therefore the battleground between East and West. The Baltic Sea to the north and the Carpathian Mountains to the south formed her borders. Her first city, Gniesno (The Nest) dates back to the sixth century. The story of the city's origin is a beautiful legend.

While clearing away the forest, the Chief of the Lesko Tribe found a White Eagle's nest in an oak tree. He took the bird as his personal emblem. Later, the eagle became the symbol of the Polish people. Powerful and courageous, the eagle would soar to dizzy heights. These people, too, loved freedom with an unquenchable ardor, accepting only the thunder of the heavens as their master.

Where the sword had failed for centuries, Christianity won over the Polish with its yoke of love. Poland officially became a Christian country with the baptism of Mieczislas the First, in 965. Her conversion was due mainly to the work and prayers of the two great missionaries Saints Cyril and Methodius.

Mieczislas' zeal was typical of many new converts. He made certain the Church's laws were respected and obeyed throughout his kingdom. In fact, he ordered that anyone found eating meat during Lent should have his teeth pulled immediately.

Poland became the bastion of Christianity in the centuries that followed. She warded off the attacks of the Tartars and Mohammedans who sought to strike at the heart of Christendom. Poland reached the apex of her power during the reign of John Sobieski in the latter part of the 17th Century. Men of that day referred to John as the "Hurricane of the North" and the "Invincible Lion."

With the death of such heroes, internal dissension sapped Poland's strength, allowing her to fall prey to the enemies at her borders. The country's downward skid was climaxed a century later when the White Eagle fell mortally wounded. Prussia, Russia and Austria moved quickly to claim the booty. The first partition occurred in 1772, followed by a second division in 1793 and a third in 1795.

October 11, 1794 was a day of national mourning. The Russians found the Polish leader, Kosciuzko, dying on the battlefield of Maciejowice. His hand grasped a scimitar. Four generals and an aide-de-camp lay beside Kosciuzko, grim partners in death. As the soldiers lifted up the Polish leader, he looked across the plains of the Vistula for the last time. Seeing his conquerors, Kosciuzko gasped, "Poland is dead."

The White Eagle made several vain attempts to raise its head. The love of liberty was growing steadily in the hearts of the Polish people. Their battle hymn of Dombrowski shook the fibre of their souls:

"No Poland is not dead.
We are living still.
That taken by force,
Will be retaken by the same force.

"March, march Dombrowski,
From Italy to Poland.
Under your leadership,
We shall free our land."

Revolution flared three times during the 19th Century. Once the Polish fought Prussia and Austria; twice they battled the Russians. Each outburst was mercilessly subdued. Defeated, humiliated and partitioned, Poland suffered in bitter silence. The White Eagle was bent but not broken. It patiently awaited another opportunity to break its bonds.

This was the world of Anthony Kowalczyk. His quiet birthplace of Dzierzanow was under Prussian domination. The tiny village comprised one large piece of property and 25 smaller farms worked by the villagers. Although there was a railway station, the village was without a church or even a chapel. The pastor of nearby Lutogniew served Dzierzanow and several other communities.

The villagers were undisturbed by the torrent of history that raged around them. They lived and worked together, closely knit by their common beliefs and sufferings.

A vine-covered shrine of St. John Nepomucene dominated the entrance to the village until the early 1800's when one of Napoleon's soldiers beheaded the statue with a sacrilegious swipe of his sword. The Kowalczyk family rescued it. Later, Marianne, the wife of Stanislaus Panek, placed the statue with its head again in place, outside her door. The saint was forced to flee to the attic during the Second World War, but stands guard over Dzierzanow today.

Ignatius Kowalczyk's low thatched house with its large windows, tiled roof and two brick chimneys, resembled the older French homes. Young Anthony would one day see similar homes in far away Quebec. An atmosphere of peace and contentment pervaded the comfortable, unpretentious house.

There was more bustle than usual that morning. With Hedwig, the eldest daughter, giving orders, several neighbors hurriedly set the table with the cutlery and china reserved for special occasions. The rich aroma of a goose cooking in the oven wafted throughout the house. The women also prepared the traditional cabbage rolls, honey cakes, cucumbers and cottage cheese.

Suddenly, someone cried, "Here they are!"

A moment later the God-father returned the newly baptized baby to Ignatius, who kissed the child tenderly and placed him in his wife's arms. She pressed Anthony to her heart. Raising her eyes to a statue of Our Lady of Lutogniew, she prayed, "Dear Blessed Mother, bless and protect my little Anthony."

And so, life began for Anthony Kowalczyk. His mother watched over him carefully, supplying his every need. Ignatius returned to the carpenter shop and the endless round of jobs on the farm. Weeks grew into months with their joys and sorrows forming a chain like the beads of a rosary.

Few in the sleepy village noticed the thunder-heads forming over Poland. Less than twenty years had passed since the cruel suppression of the revolt against the Prussians. They had attempted to annihilate the Polish race by an all-out attack on its language and its Catholic faith. Poland refused to die. She, with Catholic Germany, valiantly resisted the attack by the Prussian liberals, atheists and anti-clericals.

Bavaria had been chosen as the proving ground for the fight-to-the-death against the Church. The government usurped the Church's jurisdiction over her properties and schools. Within a few years the Church in Germany, too, was threatened.

The bitter question of German unification kept the country in a state of unrest. With political unity a fact, one language, one education and one religion were demanded. The Catholic minority became a foreign element to be absorbed or destroyed. This was Bismarck's Kulturkampf.

Such attacks against them had a unifying effect upon the Catholics. Pope Pius IX personally intervened by issuing his memorable syllabus of 1867, followed by the Vatican Council. The Catholics in Prussia spearheaded the formation of the Centre Party. This political organization prepared to fight a major battle in the Church's history.

The stream of events in Germany included captive Poland. Bismarck distrusted her. He was advised that should war materialize the Poles would side with his enemies. He was suspicious of the alliance between the Poles and the German Catholics. To crush any resistance, Bismarck unleashed his persecution here as well.

The Iron Chancellor abolished the Ministry of Catholic Worship in Germany on the pretext that

it was in league with the Poles. He gave the government absolute control of all the schools. Then, as a final blow, he attempted to establish a national Catholic Church, independent of Vatican jurisdiction.

A passive but determined resistance resulted, with the Prussian bishops and the Centre Party providing the leadership. When priests refused to pay fines, they were imprisoned or exiled. Religious congregations and associations were outlawed. A smouldering dissatisfaction with such high-handed tactics flared into open opposition.

The government continued its attacks by deposing and imprisoning a number of bishops, several from Poznan. Parishes were without priests. Religious institutions were closed. But ten years after his elevation to the Papacy, Pope Leo XIII won a restoration of religious freedom through conferences and concessions. Fear of a general uprising had forced Bismarck to acknowledge the Church's rights. The Kulturkampf was broken.

Such tension marked the youthful years of Anthony Kowalczyk. He listened attentively to the hushed discussions of the latest news. Anthony did not understand all that was being said, but even a small boy could recognize the serious expression on his father's face.

Every evening the family gathered in the flickering candle light before an altar in the living room. Weird

shadows danced on the walls and a faint light played on the face of a statue of Mary, Solace of the Afflicted. The fervent family prayed for heaven's protection. Anthony knelt close to his mother, lisping his first Aves.

Seven summers slipped by, until one September morning Anthony joined the parade of village children going to school. The carefree boy was crossing the threshold of a whole new life. The teacher watched the youngsters take their places amid a clatter and confusion that is part of every first school day. The school-room was filled with rows of desks. A clean blackboard awaited another year of learning.

"Silence," the teacher called. "Do you hear me? Silence! You are good-for-nothings. You will not speak Polish. From now on, you will speak nothing but German. Poland is dead."

The school-master's eyes flashed angrily and his face was scarlet with rage. The sudden harrangue turned the happy event of a "first day" into a terrifying experience. The children crouched in their desks. Anthony felt completely out of place. The classroom was cold and heartless. There were no crucifix, no pictures or statues like those at home. The bellowing voice spouted words he did not understand.

One thing was certain. Anthony was being scolded. For what reason, he did not know.

Anthony's first lesson was the difficult one of suffering. Both his heart and his body shared the persecution of his people. Every polish word he spoke brought punishment. The sign of the Cross and prayers were said only at home. From new text books he must learn strange sounding words.

When the first day of school finally ended, Anthony hurried home to tell his mother what had happened. Lucy Kowalczyk understood. She took a well-thumbed grammar and a faded history book from a drawer. Anthony began a new set of lessons in life's oldest school.

Lucy Kowalczyk was a good woman. In the village she was even called "holy woman" or "saint to be." She was another Monica, whose teaching, like refreshing rain, watered the soul of her son. The lessons of virtue passed swiftly from the mother's heart to that of her son.

Anthony's father approved of home education. He was a devout Christian, well read in the lives of the desert hermits. His charming stories always contained a moral. A glimpse of his sharp, solid features gave quick insight into the character of Ignatius Kowalczyk. But his stern appearance was tempered by kindness of soul.

Ignatius was first a farmer, then an artisan. To watch him work with carpenter tools or handle a plow was enough to recognize a man physically strong and

spiritually great. The role of provider kept him busy constantly.

Ignatius shared one dream with most other peasants. He wanted to own a piece of land, complete his farm buildings, have a horse or two, several head of cattle and a good flock. He worked long hours towards realizing this goal.

The Kowalczyks did own a flock of geese. When Anthony was not at school, he cared for the birds. "Bo, Bo!" Anthony would call to the wandering geese, as he directed them through the grasslands at the side of the road and the edge of the brook. He felt it was his job to discipline the delinquent geese. They, however, had other ideas. When their dignity was ruffled by a reprimand, several of the geese usually made a token charge at Anthony.

He rarely took their attacks seriously. Often the fields rang with laughter when the geese made a dash at him. Anthony's heart was happy when he led the waddling birds home after a long day. He had done his bit towards the family's upkeep.

Just before Anthony's thirteenth birthday, an event happened which he remembered vividly for the rest of his life. He had gone twice a week for two years to the Shrine of Lutogniew for religious instruction. The children would gather near the railing of the Blessed Virgin's altar. There, the pastor or a learned layman taught them their Catholic doctrine. Anthony made his

first confession. Now he was to receive Holy Communion for the first time.

The parish of Lutogniew was founded in 1401. According to the story, the builders erected a beautiful picture of Mary, Solace of the Afflicted, in an inconspicuous place in the small wooden church.

In 1823, the miraculous picture was moved to the high-altar of the newly built church, the same building that stands today. Anthony received his first Communion in that same sanctuary in 1878.

The devotion of the Polish people for Mary is a proud mark they have worn for centuries. The entire country became hers through an act of the reigning Monarch, Casimir Vubo, in 1650. The people's devotion to Mary prompted the building of countless roadside shrines and chapels. As France was called the "elder daughter of the Church," Poland could easily claim the title "elder daughter of Mary."

The Shrine of Lutogniew was known throughout Poland. Every year thousands of pilgrims journeyed there for the Feast of Mary, Comforter of the Afflicted. At times, as many as twenty-five thousand people came from the nearby communities and the more distant towns and cities.

That year, 1878, the feast fell on the first Sunday of September. Long lines of pilgrims stretched along

the roads leading to Lutogniew. They marched in procession with their banners waving and sang hymns. A chorus of Aves arose as the crowds approached the shrine. The band of first communicants lead the pilgrims.

When the time finally came for Anthony to approach the communion rail, he knew that it was the greatest moment of his life. He was prepared to welcome God into his heart for the first time. His happiness was inexpressible.

Anthony returned to his home. There his mother watched her son grow in the way of holiness. Anthony was a devout and obedient boy with a quiet sense of humor. He was a true son of Poland with three loves deeply rooted in his soul: the love of family, the love of the country and the love of his Blessed Mother.

CHAPTER II

TRIAL BY FIRE

The old clock ticked off the minutes. Ignatius and Lucy sat beneath it, the day's work finished. The children were asleep in their beds. The two spoke softly as they wrestled with the serious problem of Anthony's future.

Lucy was anxious about her son. She was sad at the prospect of his leaving home. He had worked on the farm for three years. At thirteen, it was the custom for boys to put away their school books to assist in the more important work of the fields, the garden and the barnyard.

Already, Anthony fed the horses and chickens. He herded the cattle into the pasture and joined the family excursions to hoe the potato crop. But now, the Kowalczyks faced a decision that would affect the future of their family. Anthony was no longer a boy. Shouldering responsibility for three years had made him

a man. The wise parents recognized that soon he would want to be on his own.

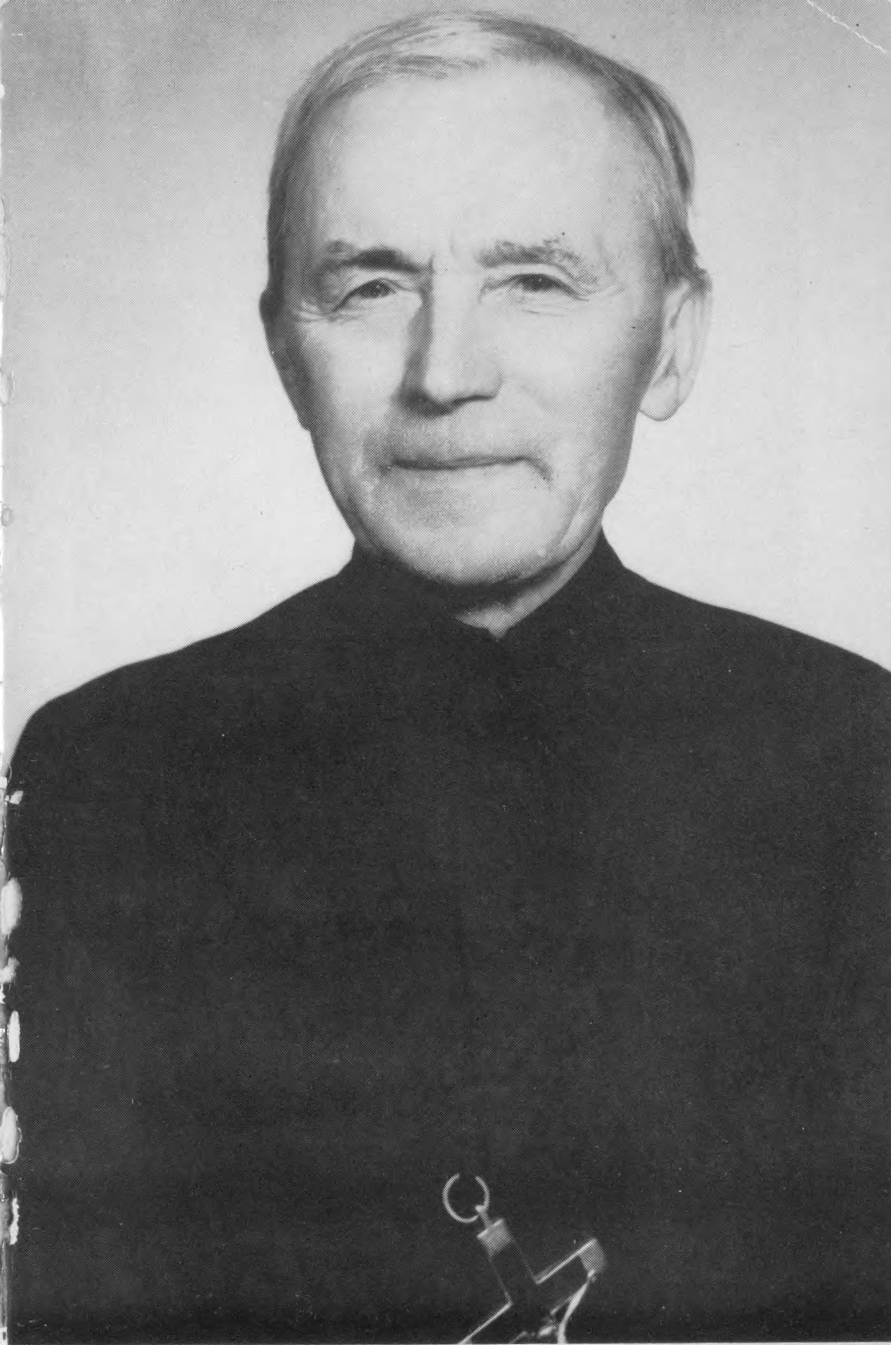
"He is a good worker," Lucy told her husband. "Anthony loves farming. If only we could give him a piece of land to set up a farm beside our own."

"That is out of the question. We can't afford it. Can we favor him more than his brothers? There is only one thing to do. Anthony must learn a trade. I shall get the information we need when I go to market." The discussion was closed.

On Fridays, the peasants gathered from the surrounding area to sell their produce. Their carts rolled along the road from early morning. They were piled high with vegetables and crates of cackling chickens. By nine o'clock the sale was underway. Busy shoppers crowded the stalls chatting with old friends and made new acquaintances.

Ignatius kept his word. He took Anthony to Krotoszin to arrange for an apprenticeship with the blacksmith. They found the burly man in his workshop. There, to the ringing of hammer against anvil, the youth's immediate future was quickly settled.

Ignatius was a man of few words, but the blacksmith spoke even fewer. A short discussion paved the way for Anthony's transformation from farmer to blacksmith's apprentice.



Reverend Anthony K. ...



*A view of Dzierzanow,
birth-place of Brother Anthony*



The home of the Kowalczyks

Anthony accepted the challenge of learning a trade enthusiastically. As a result he learned quickly. An interesting, new world opened before his eyes: the massive anvil with its heavy hammer, the forge with its breathing bellows. The young boy's muscles quickly strengthened as he beat out a steady tattoo with the hammer. The bright sparks flew like meteorites, only to die at his feet. In the song of the anvil, Anthony heard a hymn to glorify God.

The stars and the sun bless the Lord.

Heat, light, burning fire, praise, extol your Creator.

Be blessed, My God, in all your creatures.

Anthony concentrated on his work, although his thoughts continually drifted back to the peaceful farm. How he cherished the days spent along the banks of the lazy brook where he had watched over the flock of geese. But the joys of his youth were gone. Anthony's exile had begun.

His trade became the apprenticeship of his life. Anthony progressed with each job he undertook for the blacksmith. Life had changed radically for the peasant youth. It was to change even more drastically. Without Anthony fully realizing what was happening, God was forging a soul and a life.

Only one thing threatened to mar Anthony's happiness during his days as an apprentice. The blacksmith

was not a Catholic. The situation posed no real problem, because Anthony enjoyed full religious freedom. He practiced his faith as he had at home. He visited the church each morning and evening. In his new home Anthony knelt before the crucifix to say his prayers. He prayed before beginning each work day.

There was no reason for Anthony to discontinue such practices. His education and training from childhood coupled with the example of his parents had penetrated deeply into his soul. Human respect could not deter him from continuing public professions of faith. However, Anthony did miss the warmth of the family circle. The sudden end to such family practices as praying together left a void he found impossible to fill. The result was a new loneliness for the good things he had left behind.

The road to exile led Anthony farther from the home he loved so dearly. Young artisans who wished to become better artisans normally sought work in the sprawling industrial centres of Europe. To reach the dual goal of assisting his family financially and to prepare for his own future, Anthony decided to emigrate from the poorer eastern provinces to the mining and industrial centres of Westphalia and the Rhineland.

Before leaving, he went home for a short visit. On the morning of Anthony's departure, Father Wroblewski, his parish priest, offered a Mass for the young

Pole's intentions. He said it at the altar of the miraculous Virgin of Lutogniew. Anthony kissed his mother good-bye and turned his back on Dzierzanow.

The Hamburg station was noisy and crowded. Anthony, like any country boy alone in a big city for the first time, lacked self-confidence. He moved shyly through the people hurrying to or from trains. He had no definite place to go; he was just going.

A half hour later he knelt before the Blessed Virgin's altar in a nearby church. Prayer was the one consolation left to him, so Anthony poured out his soul. Poland was now far behind. The polish youth was completely isolated and alone. He had no human friend to turn to for assistance but he knew his heavenly Mother was always ready to help.

Consoled and encouraged to face his problems, Anthony left the church. He did not linger over the magnificent view of the Elbe or Lake Alster. The large stores and theatres did not attract him. He had two immediate problems: to find a job and a place to live.

He wandered the waterfront streets where he could see a forest of masts belonging to ships in the harbor. Other ships moved slowly in and out of port, their shrill whistles sounding a warning. In the background was the roar of machinery in sprawling factories, the deafening smash of a pile-driver and the clatter of scrap iron being unloaded.

Anthony was overwhelmed by the sheer weight of sound and sight that surrounded him. Man, he felt, had become a mere cog in the machines he had created. Hamburg's factory workers were slaves to their machines. And this was to be Anthony Kowalczyk's life.

He spent two years of back-breaking labor in the German factories. The term "heavy industry" was a brutal reality to Anthony. He shared the exhaustion of his fellow workers. Each time the great furnace door was opened to tap the molten iron, the young Pole's face burned a fiery red. He stirred the white hot metal and fed the furnace with pig iron. His muscles strained and bulged as he dragged the metal to the demanding furnace. Many years later, in a masterpiece of understatement Anthony remarked. "Me work hard in the big Hamburg factories."

The demoralizing atmosphere of the factory gnawed at Anthony's soul. He found this even more difficult to bear than the physically crushing work he did, day after day. He would say, "Comrades not good. Never go to church. Speak bad." Of the 1,000 workers in the factory, few were Catholics and only three of these practised their faith. The others hid the fact of their religion because of the taunts of their fellow workers.

Anthony did not escape ridicule for his belief in God. Those who worked around him often glared when he blessed himself before eating his lunch. They roared with laughter at any sign of religion.

Europe was swarming with men who waged open war on the religious beliefs of others. Factory workers were their favorite targets. Above the roar of the furnace Anthony often heard an angry foreman spew a stream of curses at a workman for the slightest error.

Anthony's heart swelled with anger and disgust. He longed for the religious atmosphere of his home, the calm and the peace of the Shrine of Lutogniew. Such places seemed now a distant dream, almost unreal.

Hamburg, itself, soured Anthony and repelled him. Amongst more than five-hundred thousand people, there was but one Catholic parish with 13,000 souls. The vulgar oaths that punctuated his working hours now returned at night to haunt him. The situation grew so bad that he was threatened by serious doubts. They loomed ever larger in his mind until he thought his faith was slipping away. Anthony hesitated for a moment, then dropped to his knees.

"My God," he cried. "I believe that you are in heaven." Once again on his feet, Anthony was unaware that those around him had watched his profession of faith.

Then it happened. Like Saul on the road to Damascus, Anthony felt a searing pain in his eyes. He could still see vaguely, but a burning sensation pierced his eyelids. He went immediately to a doctor who carefully examined him and then asked in a voice

that spelled tragedy. "Have you any means or insurance in the event that...?"

There was no need to pronounce the final judgment. Anthony realized what the doctor had left unsaid. The thought of spending the remainder of life in total darkness was difficult enough to bear, but the thought of becoming a burden to his family was more than he could take.

Even then his sight was growing dimmer. He sought comfort from prayer in his parish church. Where else could he find consolation if not from Him who had drained the Chalice of bitterness to the dregs? With Christ, Anthony would climb the hill of Calvary. "Lord if it be possible, let this chalice pass from me. Not my will, but yours be done." With this prayer came peace.

Young Anthony accepted the trial. He embraced the cross of his own crucifixion. As Jesus was comforted by His mother on the road to Calvary, so Anthony knelt at the Blessed Virgin's altar to seek help from the same Blessed Mother. He made the Way of the Cross, pouring out his feelings. From the fourth Station where Jesus meets His Mother, Anthony moved slowly until the sixth Station, where he dropped to his knees. He begged St. Veronica to help him as she had comforted Our Lord. "Lord, heal me by the service rendered you by St. Veronica."

Immediately, Anthony was filled with inexplicable joy. He tore off the bandages that covered his eyes. He was cured!

The work of cleansing was complete. No blows had been spared in the forging of this select soul. The domineering Prussian teacher, the apprenticeship under the faithless blacksmith and the ordeal in the Hamburg factory had hammered out the metal of Anthony's soul. He had been tried. He had triumphed over all.

God had tested Anthony Kowalczyk in the crucible of suffering.

CHAPTER III

ROAD TO EXILE

Anthony knew that running away from a problem does not solve it. He also realized that to stay in Hamburg was out of the question if his faith was to survive. Even before leaving the church, he had made up his mind to turn his back on a Hamburg that rivaled Sodom and Gomorrah. He would never return.

One last thing remained to be done before Anthony caught the train to the west and the Catholic Rhineland. He would equip himself with all the armour the Church could provide. Following two weeks of intensive study Anthony was prepared to receive the sacrament of Confirmation. The bishop of Hamburg administered the sacrament and Anthony waved goodbye to the city of smokestacks.

The wandering Pole breathed easier when he entered the Rhine Valley and saw a sign "Dusseldorf." Here twenty-six Catholic church spires towered over the homes and workshops of the 110,000 people. This

was more like home. Anthony even located a room with a Catholic family. For some unknown reason he stayed only two days. Something seemed to urge him onward.

Searching to find himself and the role God wished him to play in life, Anthony packed his bag a second time. He would move south to Cologne, the Cathedral City, rising majestically on the banks of the Rhine.

Wrapped in history like an old cloak, Cologne traces its origin to the time of the Roman conquest. On this site, chosen by Agrippina, the daughter of Germanicus, a group of war veterans rounded out their days. This was the year 50 A.D.

During the centuries that followed, councils were convened and treaties hammered out in the city. As its importance grew, Cologne rivalled its sister cities of Europe in artistic, industrial and commercial triumphs.

Passenger convenience was of little concern in Anthony's day. He crawled from his bed in Dusseldorf at 2:30 in the morning, dressed, packed his suitcase and boarded the Cologne train.

The dim, early morning light revealed the highly industrialized towns and cities of the Rhineland. Like so many fingers pointing skyward, the smokestacks marked the steel industry from which Anthony longed to escape. But intermingled with them were the steeples that he knew and loved.

Another Catholic worker shared his compartment. They talked of their homes and of their ambitions. Both youths wished for an opportunity to live where they could practise their religion freely.

Again Anthony found himself a stranger in a new city, but he wanted to learn about it. It was his search for knowledge that led to his first introduction to Father Adolf Kolping. Anthony's travelling companion told the story.

Father Kolping was born in 1813 in the Cologne district, the youngest son of a poor peasant family. He was not able to work in the fields because of his poor health. Instead, the Kolping boy was advised to learn a trade.

Young Adolf studied hard. Although he was no plaster saint, he wanted to become a priest. He had no money to complete his studies, so he became a shoemaker, working in the towns around Cologne. In his spare time he read every book he could find, he wrote essays and showed a definite literary talent. He learned Latin from priests who had the time and patience to give him special lessons.

The goal of one day becoming a priest gave him the courage to enrol in a Cologne grammar school at the age of 21. There were more hardships and sickness before Adolf graduated with a Bachelor's Degree. With the help of friends to support him during his seminary studies, Adolf Kolping was ordained in 1845.

As a curate at Elberfeld, Father Kolping began his apostolate to the working men. He shared their labors and solved their problems. He became the leader of the young workers, eventually establishing the Association of Professional Tradesmen, to replace the Guild system which the Industrial Revolution had wiped out. The Archbishop of Cologne and other priests strongly supported Father Kolping.

The transient workers found a second home in the Social Centre founded by the young priest. The centre was financed by the workingmen themselves. It became so popular that the idea spread to other parts of Germany and throughout Europe.

Father Kolping died in 1865 at the age of 52. His tomb became a shrine for thousands of working men who had been helped over difficult periods by the social centres and the association.

The story of Father Kolping's life was an inspiration for Anthony. He was thrilled to know that a simple worker could become a priest. A bond was forged between the priest shoemaker of Cologne and the Polish blacksmith. Anthony had considered himself unworthy to become a priest, but he could do something. He desired to consecrate himself to God in a way similar to Father Kolping, the worker-priest.

The train puffed into the Cologne station, adding more smoke to that which belched from the factories. Smoke, the universal trade-mark of the industrial centre,

blackened all the buildings in Cologne. With one final jolt, the train stopped. The passengers pushed through the milling crowd on the platform, greeted friends and hurried away.

Anthony had that stranger-in-a-big-city feeling all over again. He walked along a street, until he saw shining through the smoke and fog, the double spires of the magnificent Cologne Cathedral. He would not have been surprised had Father Kolping hurried through one of the massive doors.

Instead of entering the Cathedral Anthony found the church of the Minor Friars, where Father Kolping was buried. The young Pole knelt before the worker-priest's tomb, deeply engrossed in prayer.

What lay on the road ahead? Anthony did not attempt to answer that question. The events that had brought him to the feet of the Apostle of the Workers raced through his mind. Every step of the way since he left his home in Poland had been a battle. No one knew the anguish, the uncertainty that challenged Anthony's faith. He hardly even dared to admit to himself his one real desire in life.

The shadows lengthened. With new strength Anthony was ready to leave. Father Kolping had helped another worker. The desires of the two men to serve God were the same. Anthony had but to find the way.

Again and again while Anthony was in Cologne, he was drawn to the Friars' Minor Church, as if by

some unseen hand. He would meditate and pray at the tomb, begging for God's grace. Suddenly, his decision was made. Above the words he poured from his heart, two pounded in his ears, "Remain chaste."

All of Anthony's prayers resolved into one command from a voice he was not certain he had heard. "Go to Mulheim-on-Rhine," it ordered. Anthony went to Mulheim.

Situated on the opposite side of the Rhine, Mulheim was connected to Cologne by a long bridge. Transportation was no problem. Anthony merely packed his bags and crossed the bridge on foot. He found a job for himself, worked the day, then went hunting for a boarding house. It had already been one of the most auspicious day of Anthony's life, since he left Poland, but now his joy was complete. He located a Catholic family with a room for rent.

A rap at the door brought Mrs. Prunnenbaum. She must have been surprised by Anthony's greeting. "Madam," he began. "To come into your home pleases me as much as going to my own home. Since I left Poland, I've stayed one night in a Catholic household. That was in Dusseldorf."

Madame Prunnenbaum smiled. She knew a gentleman when she saw one. Anthony would be a welcome addition to her family.

"Are you a Catholic," she asked.

"Oh yes!"

Anthony moved in. He enjoyed being with people and listening to them talk, but for himself he had little to say. Madame Prunnebaum spoke often of her son who was studying with the Oblate Fathers. Anthony did not mention his own desire to serve God in a special way. The woman had a wisdom that is acquired with the years. She quickly learned what was in the young Pole's heart. She needed only his confirmation.

Finally, Anthony could hold back no longer. After hearing the latest news of the good woman's son, he said, "Madame, you are a fortunate woman."

"Why do you say that?" she asked.

"To have a son a religious is one of God's greatest gifts."

"Why don't you dedicate yourself to God and become a religious?"

"Me? Why, I am too old. How can I start a new life at 24?"

"Too old! You..." Madame Prunnenbaum almost burst out laughing. "Don't you know the Fathers are crying for help. They need workers just like you to carry on their work in Africa and North America. Too old..."

She outlined the vocation of a lay brother, the shadow of the priest. Together by their prayers and work in the world, they spread Christ's redemptive mission.

Both suffer and make sacrifices and both are real apostles and missionaries.

Anthony thrilled to the stories of the young men, and men not so young, who turned their backs on their families, good jobs and often brilliant futures, to consecrate themselves to God alone. Certain of them continued with their trades, others took new ones to build the houses, the schools and the churches necessary to reap the harvest of souls, whom God called to grace and baptism. She told Anthony of the missions of Canada, where there was little other than hardship and loneliness. He was moving closer with every word the woman spoke to accepting life's greatest challenge, an adventure for God.

Madame Prunnenbaum heaped coals onto a fire that was already burning. Anthony was fascinated by this woman who spoke so convincingly of the missions. He was ready to answer the call. He understood, at last, that a simple worker could do Christ's work. His decision was made. He would become a lay brother.

When she learned of his resolve, Madame Prunnenbaum took Anthony under her special guidance. She made certain that he heard Mass every morning. She roused him at five, for the young blacksmith had to be at work at seven.

Anthony was a new man. He was impatient to become a religious. A clear goal was finally in sight. Now everything he did was directed towards that end.

During his one-and-a-half years at the Prunnenbaum home, one event stands out above all the rest. Mrs. Prunnenbaum invited Anthony to make a pilgrimage to Kevelaer, a town near the Dutch border. Thousands of pilgrims journeyed there to venerate a miraculous picture that had attracted people for more than 250 years. More than 250,000 people went to Kevelaer during the jubilee feast of 1895.

"How can I go?" Anthony objected. "I can't afford it."

Madame Prunnenbaum did not intend to take no for an answer. She paid Anthony's fare to the shrine.

The pilgrimage made a deep and lasting impression upon Anthony. It was like being home before the shrine of the Virgin of Lutogniew. The two days of prayer ended with a candle-light procession. The weaving bands of light glided towards the shrine, as thousands of voices besieged Heaven with countless "Aves." A pool of light formed around the sanctuary. The crowd sang hymns and prayed far into the night. Anthony's heart was overflowing.

Everything was going too well for Anthony. The first hint of trouble came with the answer to his letter in which he asked his father's permission to enter the religious life and to volunteer for the foreign missions. Ignatius stubbornly refused to give up his son. At sixty years old he was looking towards the end of his life. How could he allow his son to go to Canada which

even then was renowned for its cold and snow. It was too much to ask of an old man.

Anthony had been taught always to obey his father. He did not want to make his vocation an act of disobedience. He attempted again to convince his father that it was God's will, but again he was unsuccessful. Disappointed with the second obstinate refusal, Anthony confided in his confessor.

"God comes before your parents," the priest told him.

Ignatius understood the verdict. He readily accepted the priest's word and gave Anthony his paternal blessing.

At the Mulheim boarding house, Anthony met another Polish blacksmith, James Ciesielski. The two became close friends, united by the same faith, the same spirit of devotion and similar aspirations to lead a perfect life. From Mulheim they proceeded to Saint Gerlach in Holland, where the pair became novices in the Congregation of Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate.

Anthony had not expected a special welcome to the novitiate, so that he was startled when the novice master asked, "Well, my friend, are you taking up the religious life because you are out of work? Do you think we should support you?"

"I have a job. That is not my reason."

“What then is your reason?”

“I have come because I was told that here I could serve God. I am afraid to die and have God say to me, ‘Did you love the world more than you loved me?’”

“In that case,” said the priest, softening noticeably, “Welcome. Come in and begin your postulancy.”

But before beginning his new life of dedication, Anthony wanted to visit his parents once more. He had not seen his father and mother for five long years. If he did not return now, then he might never see them alive again.

The harvest was heavy in Poland that year. As Anthony hurried along the winding road to his village of Dzierzanow, his mouth watered for the fruit that hung over the orchard walls. He noticed his father’s neighbors still working in the fields. They would stop only when darkness called a halt.

His heart skipped a beat when he drew near to the village. Anthony was excited. And who wouldn’t be! A first trip home in five years is not something to be taken lightly. All was behind him now. The sacrifices, the trials, the searing heat of the forge, faded from his memory. He could think of nothing but his family and the joy of being home.

In his heart Anthony realized that going home really meant a final goodbye, perhaps forever. He prayed for strength to persevere in his religious vocation.

His family, he knew, would offer the strongest temptation. His pace quickened as he rounded the final turn in the road and saw his home a few hundred yards ahead.

Anthony broke into a sprint. He was home at last. "Mother, father... I'm home!"

The next few minutes were a blur. Ignatius and Lucy threw open their arms to welcome their roving son. Once the greetings were over, the three sat down to talk over the last five years. Anthony tried to tell all that he had seen and done. It would take a week to answer the barrage of questions.

What are the people like in the Rhineland?

Did you go to Church often?

Were you really blind? Did God cure you?

Did Madame Prunnenbaum take good care of you?"

For one who preferred to listen to others, Anthony sparkled as he unfolded his story. Event by event he told how he had finally knocked on Madame Prunnenbaum's door, which in reality proved to be the threshold of his religious vocation.

Lucy Kowalczyk cried tears of joy when she first saw her Anthony again. Now she held back more tears, tears of sadness. She was, of course, pleased by Anthony's choice, but the prospect of never seeing him

again cut deeply into her motherly heart. To have a son a lay brother was an honor few mothers were granted. Lucy recognized God's will. She did not intend to stand in the way.

Ignatius, too, was happy for Anthony, but he saw matters in a different light. He did not intend to attempt openly to dissuade Anthony from joining the Oblates, although he realized that shaking the apple tree usually releases the fruit.

When the others finally went to bed, father and son sat in front of the dying embers to talk man to man. "Do you understand, my boy, the serious obligations of religious life?" Without waiting for a reply, he added, "Life is difficult in the missions. Poland's winters are mild compared to what I have heard about those in Canada. There are many dangers."

"It is no use, father. I have made up my mind. I believe God is calling me to serve Him as a lay brother. At least, I intend to find out."

Ignatius altered his line of reasoning. "Why, you can stay in Poland. Set up your own home. Look what your brothers and sisters are doing. There is much good to be done here instead of running off to some foreign country."

Anthony had not expected such determined opposition. He realized that it was born of love. His father wished only his son's happiness. There was no

sense arguing. Anthony decided, rather, to let his father talk. The words, "Come, follow me," drowned out everything Ignatius said. "You shall leave your father, your mother, your fields, your home." Anthony could not break his father's heart; he must follow the only course that lay before him.

Ignatius realized, finally, that nothing could change Anthony's mind. He placed his arm around his son's shoulder. "So be it, my son." The two went to bed.

The days that followed were busy ones for Anthony. He said goodbye to the good Virgin of Luto-gniew, to his parish priest and to his friends and neighbors. There were so many people to see and so little time.

When the last goodbye had been said, the last, "Don't forget to wear enough clothes," from his mother, Anthony waved a final farewell. He walked slowly along the path. "God be with you," his father cried. Anthony dared not look back.

His heart ached. Now he was God's blacksmith.

CHAPTER IV

THE DAY BREAKS

Life changed radically for Anthony when he returned to St. Gerlach's Novitiate on September 21st, 1891. The deafening roar of the factory was no more than a bad dream. The peace and quiet of St. Gerlach's was reminiscent of his Polish home. He had traded smoke filled streets for shaded paths. A peasant at heart, Anthony was back where he belonged. He would remain here for five years.

Only a decade before the Oblates of Mary Immaculate were forced out of France. They chose the Dutch province of Limburg, wedged between the German and Belgian frontiers, as their new home. With their persecutors left behind at the French border, the missionaries re-organized and rebuilt their training school for lay brothers on the bank of the river Geul.

The Oblate superior was anxious to give his fledgling lay brothers the training they would require in the various trades for the difficult work in the mission fields. He quickly added the necessary facilities

to graduate first class mechanics, carpenters, blacksmiths, locksmiths, bookbinders and even men who could take a clock apart and not have enough for two clocks when the job was done.

Five years later, these same refugees moved their entire juniorate of Our Lady of Sion from France to a hill several miles away. The peace the Oblates found in the valley of Geul was soon shared by other religious orders. The Jesuits and the Redemptorists founded houses in the same district.

For Anthony the novitiate was a dream come true. His wanderings, his perseverance in seeking God's will appeared to be rewarded. The temptations and distractions that had assaulted him from every side had suddenly disappeared.

The taking of the Oblate habit was the first milestone in his new religious life. The postulants made a preparatory retreat, days of silence and deep recollection. The master of novices outlined vividly the beauties of the religious life and described the rich graces God had showered upon their humble, although sublime, vocation.

"The call to the life of a lay brother is an apostolic work that only the strong of heart, the valiant and the generous can hope to perform. You must offer the Divine Master your life so that you may follow Him more closely. Eventually, you will carry his cross. You

will pray, work and sacrifice without any hope of reward in this life. The lay brother must consecrate all of his talents and energy to the saving of souls. The vocation of the lay brother is the response to the invitation in the Gospel, 'If thou wilt be perfect, come, follow me!'

As the novice master spoke, Anthony saw himself in the line of postulants receiving the Oblate soutane, their sign of renunciation inspired by God's love. Then doubts, like a dust cloud swirling across the prairie he had never seen, filled his soul. Was he daring to approach too closely to the Divine Master? Perhaps his father had been right.

With the temptation to return to the world growing stronger by the moment, Anthony was ready to leave the chapel. But at this very moment, an event happened to remove all his doubts. He swore later to the truth of what follow:

A voice in German spoke to him from a statue of the Sacred Heart. It told him, "If you wish to find peace, then leave your father, your mother, your brothers and everyone else. You are perfectly free. The choice is yours."

"My God, I shall leave all."

The voice continued, "If you do not persevere, if you return to the world, you will endanger the salvation of your soul." It was the voice from the Sacred

Heart statue that inspired Anthony to vow never to return to visit his parents.

With a few, simple words, Anthony sealed his future. "My God, you know everything that will happen to me. You have said, 'Ask and you shall receive.' I say to you, let me undergo the greatest sufferings rather than abandon you. In the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ, of the Holy Virgin and of all the saints, make me disappear from existence rather than offend you."

God's grace triumphed. Anthony was never to see his family again. He made an offering of himself to God, so that every action belonged to him. It was like raising the blind in the morning. The darkness disappeared from his soul. Anthony approached the altar full of confidence that he was fulfilling God's will.

Pride had not dictated the decision to take the Oblate habit. Rather, he was certain that if he had not accepted it, his ingratitude to God would have been greater than that of the devils in Hell. Anthony offered himself completely. He was no longer a Polish blacksmith — He was Brother Anthony Kowalczyk, O.M.I.

To make oneself an offering to God might seem like an easy matter. It is not. Such an action demands the relinquishing of every facet of mind and desire of will. Make no mistake! Brother Anthony may have made a more complete act of self renunciation than

most of his confreres, but it was merely the beginning of the novitiate.

During the year that followed he was to become a wrestler "par excellence", fighting numerous spiritual battles with himself to acquire the virtues a good religious must possess. Under the careful instruction and encouragement of the novice-master Anthony gained a more intimate knowledge of his religion. He learned the little that can be "taught" about mental prayer.

Brother Anthony Kowalczyk was a man's man. Always an energetic worker, he intended to do his share at the House of St. Gerlach. His strong build and good health made it possible for him to perform his duties well. He had neither strange mannerisms, nor affected piety. If there was anything positively his own, it was his love of silence.

Brother Anthony appeared to be serious; he was serious. After all, he had prayed, fought and suffered much to co-operate with God's grace. He did not intend to waste a moment, now that he had found his vocation. The strength he had used to beat and shape the iron in the shop, he used now to forge his soul. Brother Anthony was a young man in a hurry. With God's help he resolved to become a saint.

The young novice soon learns that the sound of the bell is for him the voice of God. When it rings, he must obey. At mealtime it is easy to say, "I must stop working, God is calling me." The real test comes

when the bell interrupts a sound sleep early in the morning. No doubt Brother Anthony found the routine demanding, but he regulated his life accordingly.

He made God the centre of his life, whether it was in the chapel, at work or during recreation periods. This compass like centering of everything on God gave him a joy that is not easily acquired. For him it was to become the theme of his life.

The Religious life is a series of little things. The daily routine is a round of small tasks. Each day the brothers see the same faces in the same places. Even in an institution dedicated to fraternal charity, minor irritations grow, because religious are human beings like the rest of men.

Perhaps that is why the Oblates' founder, even on his death bed, left as a testament to his spiritual sons the admonition, "Amongst yourselves charity, charity, charity. Amongst others — zeal for the salvation of souls."

The Polish novice took the admonition as a personal command. He intended to belong not only to God, but to his Brothers as well. Whenever others asked him for a favor, he would always be ready to oblige. Never would he refuse a request to perform a service for a confrere.

Brother Anthony's trademark was the rosary. The Hail Marys rolled from his lips as he fingered his beads

*Lutogniew, a famous
shrine where Brother
Anthony was bap-
tized*



*Novitiate of St. Ger-
lach, Holland*





*Lac La Biche,
one of the oldest missions in Western Canada*



Mission of Saint Paul, Alberta. The mill

whenever he was free. Every action became a prayer. He was convinced that a job well done is a prayer well said. The deft movements of his hands reminded one of the artist or the surgeon.

Despite his silence and solitude, his withdrawal from the crowd, Brother Anthony became the talk of the novitiate for his outstanding virtue. Whenever mention was made of him, the brother quickly changed the subject. His poor command of French made it simple. "Me Polish," he would reply to questions. "Me too ignorant to speak well." A faint smile edged from the corners of his mouth. The other brothers laughed heartily as Brother Anthony seemed to cultivate his own ignorance.

The chapel was the home of a Friend, where one could come early and stay late. But Brother Anthony obeyed the bell, even when it called him from his prayers. To keep secret the many hours spent in the chapel, he resorted to stratagems. He would leave by a side door to re-enter the main gate as though he was coming from the garden.

Ordinarily, laughter is a refreshing tonic, except for the one who is the object of that laughter. Brother Anthony found all eyes trained and ears cocked when he stood up to read in the novitiate dining room. His first attempts at French were hilariously funny. He refused to quit even though he was deeply embarrassed.

As the public reading 'lessons' rooted out any pride lingering in the brother's character, he was determined to bring his body into line for the even more vigorous spiritual battles that lay ahead. Brother Anthony had a robust appetite that was sharpened by hard work, but he never allowed himself the luxury of a second helping. Breakfast was hardly enough to launch a full day's work, but he kept himself from nibbling at food between meals.

He lashed his body unmercifully with the discipline on Friday evenings. On more than one occasion his confreres expected to find blood on the floor of the Polish novice's cell.

The days slipped by until the time of probation was over. The novice-master presented his reports on the young religious the evening before the call to vows. Concerning Brother Anthony, he wrote, "...his conduct has always reflected his strong faith. He is free of any military obligations. This brother is in good health. He has a rugged constitution and is fitted for various types of work. He seems especially talented as a blacksmith."

The report continued, "He is intelligent enough and his education meets the requirements for the life of a lay brother. His energy and virtues point towards a life of piety with every promise that he will become a good religious. He appears to be devout and seems well suited to community life."

A final paragraph in the report gives a hint of Brother Anthony's future. "He is Polish, he does not know German too well. and finds French difficult to learn. Brother Anthony's main wish is to serve in the foreign missions."

Following the taking of his vows on October 2nd, 1892, the Polish brother was sent to St. Charles Juniorate where he began his duties. The rapidly growing school was well equipped for the 200 junior clerics who were enrolled. Their numbers increased so quickly that a building program was begun shortly after Brother Anthony arrived. He had thrived on hard work since his early boyhood, so that the construction job was an opportunity for him to use his talents.

The priests and brothers shaded their eyes to watch the "new" brother cling to a partially completed roof as he added more brick and tile. They often feared for his safety. Anthony, unaware of their concern, continued to amaze all out watched him. He was undisturbed by height or his precarious perch and moved confidently through the web of beams over partially finished walls.

Unconsciously, he won the admiration of his fellow workers and especially the Superior. "He is talented in every kind of work," was the Superior's verdict. Brother Anthony went blithely about his work without attempting to impress people, but always trying to do a better job. One week he was the mechanic, the next

he worked in the boiler room. The electrical installations were his responsibility. He even installed an entire blacksmith shop. For the next four years he kept the sometimes temperamental heating, lighting and plumbing working smoothly.

Brother Anthony's days at the Juniorate were far from a succession of rosy incidents. He was following the footsteps of Christ. The little nagging crosses of everyday living weighed upon his shoulders.

One day, his Superior approached Brother Anthony with the idea of testing his humility. He greeted the brother with the retort, "You are a good-for-nothing in this congregation."

There was no flare-up of rebellion at the injustice. "Let me think it over," was the Brother's only reply.

And think it over he did. Three days later, Brother Anthony announced to the superior, "Father, I am no good. I leave."

To the confused brother, the superior replied, "No you stay."

When Brother Anthony finally had been transferred to another house, the same Superior went to the tailor-shop for pieces of the humble brother's clothing. He picked up a hat left behind. "The hat of a saint."

We could call Brother Anthony a "solid character." He was like the rock on the beach, with the tide pound-ind against it unmercifully, but with little effect. What

would have been enough to upset the most composed rolled off his back like the water off the rock. No one could remember having seen him sidestep a difficult task or resort to anger when a situation warranted it.

At the same time, his composure was not produced by strangling his feelings. Rather, it was the natural outcome of a soul at peace with God, with itself and with all men.

It was no secret that when the Superior was particularly weighed down by difficulties, he would send a hurried call to Brother Anthony to 'get busy with a few prayers.' His call for assistance seemed almost invariably answered.

One incident may serve to illustrate this point. The cook sent an S.O.S. to Brother Anthony. "Something is wrong with the kitchen tap. I need water right away or there won't be any supper."

"Before we try something, we say Hail Mary." The brother dropped to his knees before a statue of Our Lady. One Ave and he went to work. A gentle tap with a hammer brought a gush of water. The cook stepped back to scratch his head in amazement. Brother Anthony smiled and left the kitchen before the cook could thank him.

On another occasion, Brother James was working at the inside of a deep well. To climb in and out he used a ladder that had to be moved several times from

one level to another. Far from the top, Brother James realized that if he moved the ladder he would fall to the bottom of the well.

"Brother Anthony, help me. I'm falling," he cried.

Almost before the final shout had left his lips, Brother Anthony was standing beside him. Needless to say, Brother James did not fall. He was completely stunned by his companion's quick descent. Once again, Brother Anthony went about his work as if nothing extraordinary had happened.

A third incident shows the Polish brother's complete reliance on prayer to overcome what appeared to others as impossible. Two brothers were installing a new machine in the workshop. A light transmission shaft had to be replaced by a heavier one. No matter how hard they lifted and tugged, there was no way to raise it into place by hand.

"Brother Anthony, will you help us lift this?"

He studied the situation for a moment, then replied, "Leave it. It go." He repeated a familiar pattern. After a short prayer, he placed a cable around the shaft, braced himself and lifted. The heavy piece slipped into place. To their cheers Brother Anthony answered, "Me too ignorant to speak right."

Brother Anthony pursued perfection faithfully. His superior was so greatly impressed that he reported, "This Brother has good health, solid piety and he is

well spoken of by his confreres. He is obliging and completely faithful to his calling. He is eagerly looking forward to his vows and I see nothing standing in his way. I heartily endorse his petition."

He took his vows in October 26, 1893.

Like the combat soldier trained to fight but never allowed more than the taste of a mock battle, Brother Anthony wanted to do more in the service of God. He had left his family and his country forever. He had joined the Oblates to sacrifice himself completely. Now he burned with the desire to work in the foreign mission fields.

Time after time he requested a transfer to an overseas country. His request was repeatedly refused. Lay brothers were not easily acquired. There were hardly enough to fill the needs at home without sending them away. Brother Anthony was much more valuable to the community than most. The Superior recognized him for the excellent Brother he was. He wanted to keep Brother Anthony where he needed him.

His hopes rose in the autumn of 1894 when he was chosen to work as a mechanic at St. Joseph's Orphanage in Colombo, Ceylon. Three days after he got his obedience, Brother Anthony's hopes were dashed again.

"Unpack," the provincial ordered. "You are too unworthy to go to the missions." Brother Anthony

bordered on despair. But he took the rebuke without saying a word. His opportunity would come, and it did.

Finally, he was ordered to the missions in Western Canada. The Superior at St. Charles did not want to lose Brother Anthony, but go he must. Of the humble Brother, he wrote, "It is a great honor for me to send one of our finest workers to the Canadian West. He is the best of our Lay Brothers — a saint in the making."

Brother Anthony shook hands for the last time with the priests, brothers and students on May 19, 1896. The day he longed for had finally arrived. He knelt in the chapel to say a final prayer.

The next day he boarded ship for that strange, new land. He was on the road to exile. Bring on the most difficult sacrifices, Brother Anthony was prepared to face them with God's help.

CHAPTER V

THE DISABLED BROTHER

A new century, a new country and a new life were opening up before the Polish brother's eyes. His dream of serving God in the foreign missions had finally become a reality with his arrival in Canada. The immense country completely dwarfed any notion he had of distance. He had travelled many days, but still he had not reached the broad plains of Western Canada where the buffalo still roamed in great herds.

For centuries the endless plains had been host to hardy Indian bands that wandered as freely as the wind. All that was changing. The carts of pioneer settlers, who followed the trail blazed by the missionaries and traders, rutted the prairies. The trains brought thousands more to swell the growing tide of civilization.

Brother Anthony arrived at Quebec City on June 1st 1896. He left immediately for Montreal where he rested for three days before beginning his westward journey.

The days spent crossing Quebec and Ontario and then into the west were exciting for him. He wanted to see everything and remember everything he saw. After

a short stopover in Calgary, he travelled the final 200 miles to Edmonton.

Little did Brother Anthony realize that he would live in Western Canada, in this very area for the next 50 years. His arrival did not go unrecorded. Bishop Vital Grandin, the Bishop of St. Albert, several miles north of Edmonton, wrote in his diary, "On the 11th of June, the good Brother Kowalczyk came to us. He is Polish and an engineer. He is capable and most of all an excellent religious."

The Edmonton of 1896 was a thriving community of 2,000 people. Still in its infancy, this bustling centre promised a prosperous future. Agriculture formed its broad economic base. Years later, oil discoveries would add even more wealth to an already fortunate people.

Edmonton was the jumping off point for Klondyke prospectors who could not wait to harvest the golden wealth of the grain fields. They were anxious to move north. The boom established Edmonton as a supply point, not only for the prospectors, but for the missionaries as well.

The religious institutions in Edmonton were grouped to one side of the business section and north of the Fort. There was St. Joachim's Church with its rectory, a boarding school operated by the Sisters Faithful Companions of Jesus, a Catholic school and the General Hospital under the direction of the Grey Nuns.

It did not take long for Brother Anthony to demonstrate that he was a good man to have around. It rained during the entire month of May and for several days in June that year. What roads there were soon became impassable. Food supplies began to dwindle rapidly. "The cattle are thin," reported the Lac La Biche Chronicler.

Father Henry Grandin somehow managed to reach Edmonton from the Lac La Biche Mission to buy supplies. On the return trip there were eleven heavily loaded wagons and sixteen passengers, including Brother Anthony.

The wagon train inched along the mud clogged roads, which even in dry weather were little more than ruts. The famous trails of the old west provided none of the comfort of today's modern highways. The horses strained to pull their heavy loads through the mud. Often it was necessary to use six teams to pull one wagon.

The axles creaked as the wagons bounced from side to side. The passengers felt every bump and hole. One mile of mud was like every other mile on the weary journey. The blazing sun beat down on the Sisters' heavy habits. Their only relief was a sudden thunder shower that supplied its own brand of misery. Dusk was a welcome sight. Once the wagons were secured on high ground, the tired travellers relaxed to enjoy the evening meal. The smoke from the open

fires drove away the marauding bands of mosquitoes that attacked in uninterrupted waves. The cricket's chirp and the forlorn howl of a lonesome coyote accompanied the steady drone of night prayers. The final Aves said, the wagon train passengers rolled themselves in their blankets for a good night's rest.

The days passed slowly and painfully. The wagons crossed the North Saskatchewan River and paused at the Mission of Lac LaSelle. They moved on to White Fish Lake. Father Grandin, Brother Anthony and Sylvestre Bourque led the caravan.

At the foot of a short hill, their wagon sank into the gooey mud. The whips snapped hopefully, but to no avail. The wagon was mired in the mud on the edge of a bog, 300 yards wide. Father Grandin pushed back his large hat and rubbed his forehead. They could not stop. They must carry on. But how?

Brother Anthony did not scratch his head. He got off the wagon and walked across the marsh. He carried a small branch and a holy picture. He sank several times to his knees in the water and muskeg, but finally located the firm ground. There he dropped to his knees and prayed.

A half hour later he was still deeply engrossed in prayer. The drivers were men of more direct action. While they were not against saying a prayer or two, the brother's action was wasted time as far as they

were concerned. Was he trying to arrange for a band of angels to haul the wagons through the mud.

Father Grandin put a stop to the grumbling. "Now, now, men! Stop that kind of talk. Brother is going to get us through."

After one hour on his knees Brother Anthony blessed himself and ordered Bourque, the head driver to "make the crossing." Bourque stared at the brother for a moment, then signalled with his arm to the other drivers. "C'mon. Let's try it."

The horses strained in their harness. The wagons creaked forward, splashing through the bog without a stop. Bourque stopped his horses on the high spot where Brother Anthony had knelt so long in prayer. He did not understand how the wagon had slid and jolted through the mud. He was certain of only one thing. It had been done.

The remaining drivers followed Bourque's route. Within fifteen minutes the wagon train was ready to move onward. For the rest of the day, the passengers talked of nothing but Brother Anthony and his powerful prayers.

Eleven days out of Edmonton the wagon train sighted the Mission of Lac La Biche. Hardly could heaven have been a more welcome sight. Brother Anthony was pleased, because at last his missionary life was beginning.

The following week, Father Grandin wrote to his Superior General: "I do not know how to thank you for answering my request for an engineer brother to service our machines. I decided not to write to you until he arrived and I had a chance to try him out. Brother Kowalczyk joined us in Edmonton. He weathered the difficult journey to Lac La Biche like a veteran. I have nothing but the highest praise for him. Again, accept my thanks for this brother.

"He was most edifying to me and to the four Metis who made the trip. The brother is at home working with the engine. If only he could express himself better in French, I am sure he would have solved many of our small problems..."

Brother Anthony found plenty of hard work on the shores of Lac La Biche. Despite the rigorous life, he spent many hours in prayer and meditation before the tabernacle in the mission chapel. He was a valued member of the mission staff because of his skill in keeping the machinery operating well. More than this, the little brother bolstered the spiritual strength of the missionary team whose first aim was to draw the simple Indians and Metis closer to God.

Brother Anthony prayed, "My Father, I place myself in your hands. Do with me what is pleasing to you. I will thank you for whatever you do to me. I am ready for anything. I accept everything, provided Your will be done in me and in all Your creatures..."

God was about to answer his prayer sooner than Brother Anthony might have hoped.

A year later, the shadow of tragedy crossed the community of Notre Dame des Victoires. The day was July 15th, the feast of St. Henry, Father Grandin's patron saint. Although it was a holiday, there was work to be done as usual.

Brother Anthony was busy in the sawmill hurrying to complete a large order of lumber for the new orphanage at Saddle Lake. The saw blade whirled from dawn to dusk. No matter how quickly he worked, there was always the call, "Quickly brother, the teamster are waiting for the lumber."

Brother Anthony boosted his production and his prayers, until the Aves piled up as quickly as the sawdust. Then it happened.

Sylvestre Bourque heard a cry of pain. He saw the blade still whirring in the bright sunlight and Brother Anthony lying on the ground. A quick examination showed that his arm had been mangled in the fast-moving power belt. Between the crushed fingers, Bourque noticed Brother Anthony was clutching his rosary.

A few moments later, the poor brother was able to climb to his feet and with a faint smile, he remarked, "It is God's will."

News of the accident spread rapidly. Fortunately, a visiting Grey Nun was a trained nurse. She treated

the arm as best she could with the few medical supplies that were available. Brother Anthony showed little concern over the unfortunate accident. It was God's will and he intended to accept it without murmuring.

According to the mission diary, Father Grandin left as soon as he heard about the accident to summon the doctor from Lac LaSelle. "This is treaty day for the Indians," the diary writer reported. "When will the doctor arrive?"

July 16: Brother Anthony's arm is as well as can be expected. Still no doctor."

July 17: "Doctor Aylen arrived from Fort Saskatchewan. Father Grandin met him on the road to Lac LaSelle. The doctor thinks the brother's hand may be saved. He advises moving the patient to Edmonton."

By two o'clock that afternoon Father Grandin had organized an ambulance party to move Brother Anthony to the hospital in Edmonton. Two sisters cared for him in the wagon. Sylvestre Bourque was in his familiar place as guide.

The wagon bumped along for four agonizing days. There was no mud to fight this trip, but the boiling sun and the mosquitoes aggravated an already serious situation.

Brother Anthony looked more like a tourist seeing the country for the first time rather than a seriously ill patient on his way to the hospital. He spent the

weary hours on the road praying. There never was a word of complaint. When the ambulance reached Edmonton gangrene had already set in. Only an amputation of the arm could save Brother Anthony's life.

The operation was scheduled for 10 o'clock the following morning. Two doctors and a nurse stood by. Because anaesthetic was rare in the frontier area, the doctors prepared to strap Brother Anthony to the operating table.

"Don't do that," he told them. "Give me my crucifix. That will be enough." He was determined to follow his Master, no matter what the journey would cost him in suffering. The doctors hesitated momentarily, then handed the brother his Oblate cross.

After a short prayer, Brother Anthony said to the doctors, "Go ahead. I am ready." Still clutching the crucifix, he felt the sharp cut of the surgeon's scalpel. The patient appeared to slip into another world. He was fully conscious during the operation and endured it without a cry of pain. Years of suffering had given Brother Anthony control over his body, no matter how intense the pain might become.

After what must have seemed like an eternity to Brother Anthony, the operation was completed. It was entirely successful.

Bishop Legal, who had recently been named co-adjutor to Bishop Grandin, wrote in his personal diary:

"The Polish Brother continues to improve."

July 24: "I made the trip to Edmonton to visit Brother Kowalczyk. What I have heard about him is true. He is an excellent religious, pious and fervent.

"A sudden rise in the brother's temperature alarmed the doctors, but the patient is much better this morning. Rain held up our return to St. Albert, so I was present when the first dressing was changed following the operation. Everything appears to be healing well. We hope there will be no bad effects."

As far as Brother Anthony was concerned, there were no holidays from religious duties. When the Angelus bell rang after the operation he knelt on the floor at the edge of the bed. This was too much, even for Brother Anthony. The room began to spin so he climbed back into bed to finish the prayer.

Brother Anthony's mental attitude was not good during the convalescent period. Fear of the future, a future in which he had but one good arm, began to prey upon his mind. He worried continually that the accident would prevent him from taking final vows. What good is a one-armed brother, he thought? Will I be allowed to take my final vows before I die?

Bishop Grandin gave the necessary permission for him to take the vows in case his condition grew worse.

Instead, the brother grew stronger each day. Four weeks later he was discharged from the hospital and on his way to St. Albert.

Despite the bishop's willingness to allow him to take his vows should death be near, Brother Anthony continued to fret and worry. To clear his mind once and for all, he wrote to the Superior General.

"Permit the poor Brother Anthony to write you a word before returning to Lac La Biche. You have heard of my accident. Father Grandin and the sisters took me to Edmonton where the doctors cut off my hand on July 22nd. I am well now and I have come to St. Albert for a rest. I shall return to Lac La Biche soon.

"I was afraid when the accident happened that I would not remain an Oblate. Father Grandin told me, 'It does not matter, you will be an Oblate.' Father Grandin is happy, the bishops are happy and I am happy. I hope you are happy too, my good Father.

"I will never be able to say thank you enough to everyone.

"I pray the good God will bless them and pray for me. Please give me your blessing."

During the return trip to Lac La Biche Brother Anthony wondered about his future, a future with one arm. The arm had healed, but where there had been

two skilful hands to carry out the myriad of duties, now there was but one.

A re-education was necessary. Like a small child, the brother learned to butter his bread with his left hand. Even the sign of the cross was difficult to make. No matter how hard he tried he could not overcome the tendency to use the hand that was no longer there. If he was not able to be as good a blacksmith as before, then Brother Anthony determined to become a better religious.

Feeding fuel to the fire of his determination was the thought of final vows. Brother Anthony knew they must be taken at all cost. Orders came from the superior for him to gather together his meagre belongings and move to the newly founded mission at St. Paul des Metis.

Finally, the time came for Brother Anthony to make his retreat at St. Albert in preparation for final vows. The Oblate Fathers and brothers came from every part of the vicariate to spend the days in silence and prayer. Most had not seen each other since the Retreat the year before. They talked and laughed about their experiences "on the mission."

A startling new invention called "the phonograph" attracted much attention prior to the start of the retreat. The priests and brothers gathered around to hear the scratchy, but to them, golden tones. Bishop Legal admitted that while he visited a fair in Edmonton,

“What attracted me most was a phonograph operated by a Mr. MacNamara.”

You can imagine what the new machine must have meant to the missionaries, isolated among the Indians with little more than a Brave’s whoop and the mosquitoes’ hum to break the silence. Its music to them was a heavenly symphony. The toll of the mission bell put a sudden end to the music, the laughter and the tale swapping. The Annual Retreat had begun.

Brother Anthony plunged into the Retreat exercises with all the fervor and attention he could muster. A veil of constant prayer and recollection covered the Polish brother. He prepared well for the final vows he would pronounce at the retreat’s conclusion.

The happy day came on January 17th, the feast of his patron, St. Anthony. He knelt before Bishop Legal to take the life-long vows.

Bishop Legal had this to say about the event, “I celebrated the community Mass at 6:30. At Communion, Brother Anthony spoke the words of his vows in French. Following the customary prayers at the conclusion of Mass, I blessed a crucifix and scapular and returned them together with a book of rules to the brother.”

In a clear, firm voice, Brother Anthony said, “I, Anthony Kowalczyk, make the vow of poverty, of chastity and of obedience for the rest of my life.”

The offering was complete. He had already sacrificed his family, his country and now he had given himself to God. The last attachment to the world was cut. Brother Anthony was an Oblate for life. His wandering had ended!

CHAPTER VI

THE SWINE
OF BROTHER ANTHONY

July 15, 1896. A new danger threatened the existence of the Cree Metis. The battles with the white-men had been fought and lost. Now, camped on the outskirts of the growing western towns, they lived in squalor and misery, unable to compete in this entirely new way of life.

One man cared for the Metis and understood their problems. He was the black robed missionary, Father Albert Lacombe. Liquor, idleness and the corruption spread by the gold-hunters made life unbearable. It was like a hand that reached out to destroy these people.

Father Lacombe won the first round in his fight for the Metis when the Government agreed to set aside for them a large area teeming with fish and game. It was an opportunity to regain their lost dignity by returning to the only life they really knew.

At the invitation of Father Lacombe, another Oblate, Father Adeodat Therien, pitched his tent at

Lac des Œufs, south of Lac La Biche. His parish consisted of three families: Pierre Okanes, Simon Marron (Desjarlais) and Gabriel Cardinal. Father Therien's second tent housed a Metis couple who had accompanied him. His own tent served as a chapel.

Word of the colony spread from one Metis family to another like a prairie fire. Father Lacombe had promised to build a church and school and provide each family with eighty acres of land. He leaned heavily on Divine Providence to supply his needs.

By 1897, fifty families had settled in the new area. Most of the couples had from eight to ten children. They were destitute and searching for even a shred of security.

Brother Anthony and a confrere, Brother Moelic, were sent to assist the beleaguered Father Therien. Faced with a shack town, undeveloped land and a band of Crees that would make a modern welfare worker shudder, the trio set up a sawmill and a flourmill. There were no buildings to shelter the few animals they brought with them. A clump of willows temporarily housed the machinery.

Brother Anthony's dream of a life of exile found its fulfillment with God's most wretched children. The Brother was their servant; he shared the squalor of these unfortunates caught in the backwash of the white-man's civilization. For ten years he struggled to rescue the Metis from their own despair. Brother Anthony was

the engineer, mechanic and gardener of the humble mission. He even cared for the pigs.

The sudden arrival of the white man with his permanent towns had not ended the Indians' wanderings across the flat plains. Their caravans passed in long lines as they journeyed from Fort Edmonton to Battleford, Winnipeg and St. Boniface. The creaking carts often broke down when shafts and axels snapped under the weight of their heavy loads.

Always a practical man, Brother Anthony set up a forge at the side of the road to make repairs after his daily chores were finished. Between the strokes of the hammer he noticed the hunger that made the difficult trip unbearable for the Indians. He partially alleviated this need by planting a garden in the rich soil.

At least one young Metisse credited Brother Anthony's garden with saving her family's life. She was discovered gathering vegetables in the garden and explained that this was all the food her family had.

The Mission of St. Paul des Metis played an important role in the development of that section of Alberta. It kept pace with the growth throughout the area. Within a short time a house was built for the priest, a convent for the sisters and a boarding school for more than one-hundred children. The Metis' living standard crept upwards when new homes replaced their dilapidated shacks.

Brother Anthony was responsible for supplying the lumber for the new construction. As the mission grew, the problems of feeding and clothing more people multiplied rapidly.

To ease the food shortage, the Superior decided the mission should raise pigs. They would add more meat to the plain diet of the missionaries and people and bolster the mission's income as well. Brother Anthony was picked for the job.

His charges, between 150 to 200 of them, prompted only one comment from him. "Feeding pigs is the work that suits me best." Time for the new responsibility had to be stolen from his already curtailed sleeping hours.

From the first day in the novitiate, Brother Anthony considered his Superior's slightest wish a command to be obeyed. He took seriously a chance remark that had been intended as a joke. It left the mission amazed.

Hail had beaten the grain crop into the ground, which meant there was no feed for the pigs the following spring. Brother Anthony decided to tell the Superior of the pigs' plight. "Father, we have no grain to feed the pigs," he said.

"Why Brother, just turn the swine loose and they will feed on the grass near the lake." That was command enough for Brother Anthony.

After Mass the following morning the Superior asked another Brother the whereabouts of Brother Anthony. It was so unlike him to miss Mass.

"There is no sign of Brother Anthony," was the reply.

"Have you checked his room?"

"Yes. I'm not certain, but I think he took you at your word," the brother said. "I think he is on the lake shore with the pigs."

A small boy carried a message to Brother Anthony to return the pigs to the mission. The Brother refused to come back. The Superior had ordered him to go to the lake. He had no intention of disobeying that command.

When the small boy returned alone, Brother Nemos went in person to deliver the Superior's message. Again the Superior had spoken, so Brother Anthony returned immediately with his pigs in single file behind him.

The incident sparked a controversy among the sisters at the convent. Some thought the brother's show of complete obedience was an example to be admired and imitated. Others disagreed. "You've got to distinguish a joke from a command," they argued.

Father Therien settled the friendly argument with, "My dear Sisters, a superior should never joke with a religious like Brother Anthony."

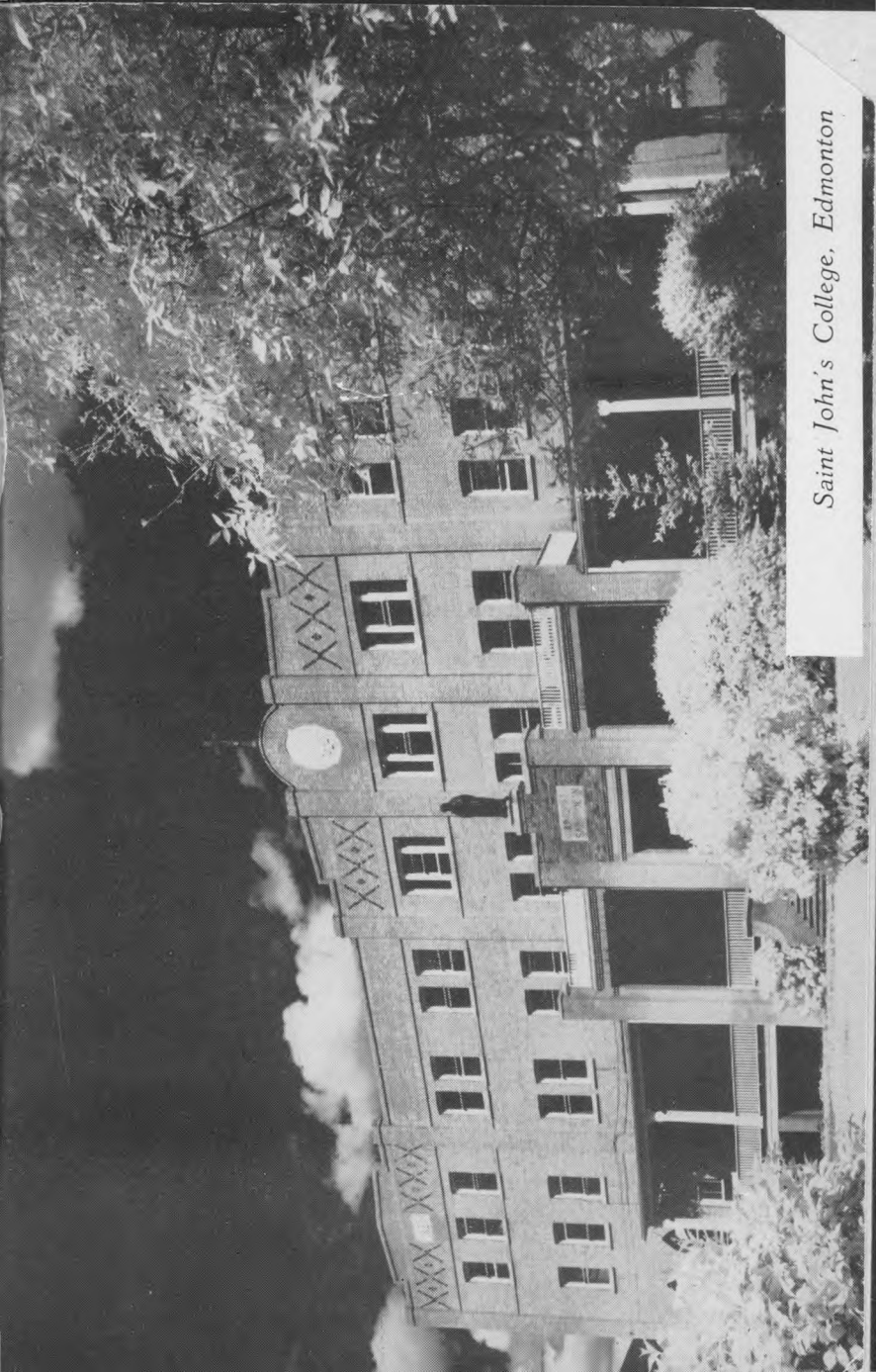
Problems of growth and expansion confronted the missionaries at the turn of the century. The already cramped quarters at the Mission of St. Paul des Metis had to be juggled to handle the arrival of the sisters. The Lay Brothers gave up their rooms and moved into the pig pen. The pigs, of course, were moved elsewhere and the humble hut was renovated and redecorated to accommodate the brothers.

Far from feeling that he was badly done by, the Polish brother hailed the move as a step closer to his Divine Master. "After all, was not Our Lord born in a stable?"

The pigs grew thinner and thinner as the summer wore on. Quick action was necessary if the starving animals were to be saved. A field of turnips, planted for just such an emergency, would solve the problem. Unfortunately, the pigs had to pass through a field of oats to reach them.

The Superior pondered the problem as the pigs grew weaker. He could not turn them loose to ruin the oats and yet, they must get to the turnip field. He snapped his fingers. "Of course! Brother Anthony is the man," he cried.

The following morning he called Brother Anthony to his room. He could hardly keep from smiling, knowing the humble Brother would take his request seriously.



Saint John's College, Edmonton

*Brother
Anthony's
room*



"Brother Anthony, you will drive the pigs to the turnip field. Follow the path that crosses the oatfield, but be extremely careful. Do not allow one animal to feed on the oats. Is that clear?"

"But, that is impossible, Father!"

"Impossible? That word is not in the French language. On your way!"

"As you say Father. I shall chase the pigs."

The pigs grunted a welcome to Brother Anthony when he entered the enclosure. They were hungry and told their keeper the whole story. He paused to look at the starving animals. The Superior had given a command. Brother Anthony knew he was expected to keep the pigs from eating the oats. Just how, he was not certain.

"Kiou, Kiou, Kiou, let's go to the turnip field. Food! Food!"

The pigs found new strength at the mention of food. They pushed and squealed to be first through the gate. All one-hundred-and-fifty pigs squirmed towards their first full meal in several weeks.

"Kiou, Kiou! Come my little ones, this way. It is the superior who commands."

Brother Anthony did not notice the small crowd that had gathered to watch the parade of pigs. All, of course, were convinced that the pigs would stop to

feed in the field of oats and go no farther. Although the group agreed that difficult tasks were Brother Anthony's meat, this was asking too much.

The pigs moved closer and closer to the oats, which at that moment must have been more inviting than the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. It was a tense moment. The pigs stopped, with the towering oats waving gently in the breeze. Brother Anthony dropped to his knees to say a short prayer.

"Kiou, Kiou. I forbid you to touch the grain," he told the snorting pigs. Follow me. There is food in the next field."

The Polish brother walked along the path leading to the turnip field. He expected the pigs to follow him without touching the oats. There was a moment of hesitation, then the pigs fell into line, leaving the oats unmolested.

The spectators were dumbfounded. "Who is this brother?" they asked. "He says the word and even the pigs obey him." Brother Anthony had definitely won the day.

The next three years were extremely difficult for Brother Anthony. His duties accumulated until the day was not long enough for him to do all the work. He cut sharply into his hours for sleeping to care for the pigs, now seventy-five in number. Finally, he could not carry on.

He requested the Superior to relieve him of at least some of his duties. The priest refused. Brother Anthony insisted, but was impatiently ordered from the room. He left momentarily only to return to ask forgiveness for any offense he may have committed by his hasty action.

"For your penance," said the Superior, "I forbid you to receive Holy Communion, except on Sundays, for three months!"

The death sentence could not have stunned the brother more. The words pounded in his ears. Not to receive Holy Communion for three months! Surely he must have misunderstood the Superior. He was willing to undergo any mortification, perform any penance, but to be deprived the Bread of Life was more than he could endure.

In the weeks that followed, Brother Anthony carried on his duties, but it was noticeable that he was starving spiritually. On the First Friday of the month he reached the breaking point during Mass. As the celebrant raised the Sacred Host before Communion, Brother Anthony burst into heavy, uncontrollable sobs.

Despite the heavy cross, he regained his former composure. He worked as hard as ever. He rose long before the rest of the community, and this gave him an opportunity to make the Way of the Cross and to perform other devotions before beginning his work for

the day. Brother Anthony maintained his spirit of recollection throughout the day, kneeling to say a short prayer before starting every job.

With the day's work completed, Brother Anthony hurried to his room where he found the peace and solitude his soul craved. In one corner was a small altar with a statue of the Infant Jesus of Prague. A tabernacle made for him by a worker at the mission stood on the altar. Night after night he spent several hours on his knees in prayer, until, at last, the Superior ordered him to go to bed for badly needed sleep.

The priests and other brothers of the community were well aware of his love for prayer and deep spirituality. The Superior counted heavily upon Brother Anthony for help when major decisions were in the making.

One day the Superior asked him to spend a quarter of an hour in prayer before the tabernacle. "Pray hard for me." Brother Anthony hurried to carry out the command. This was the work he liked best of all. Just how powerful were the Brother's prayers? The following incident gives some indication.

Several men at the mission were planing lumber, when suddenly the machine stopped cutting. They discovered that the planing knife had disappeared into a pile of shavings. They prodded and searched the pile without success. Acquiring a new blade meant a three day journey to Vegreville.

One man suggested calling Brother Anthony. "Surely, he could help," he said. Brother Anthony checked the machine carefully, then dropped to his knees to say the customary prayers that preceded all such searches. He paused for a moment and then plunged his hand in a spot the men had failed to try. The missing blade appeared and the men cheered.

There were other cases. Brother Anthony was travelling with a group through the bush when a rivet dropped out of the wagon axle and became lost in the dense undergrowth. The Brother hunted for the missing rivet in a clearing far from the group.

"Hey Brother, you won't find the rivet over there. Help us look here."

Brother Anthony called back, "Why look in the damp bush or the river. You catch cold or even drown. I'll search here. It is dry."

"What's the point in looking there. The rivet fell here."

"That's no place to lose anything. I'm going to look here." While the men still wondered what game the Brother was playing, he walked towards them carrying the missing rivet.

Brother Anthony was called upon for help whenever there were graces to be obtained, lost objects to be found or the sick to be comforted. He was ready at all times to pray for anyone. He prayed for God's will

to be done, although this was not always the will of those who asked his prayers.

On one occasion, Brother Anthony was asked to pray for the recovery of the Mother Superior of the mission convent. Because she was not expected to live through the night, he offered to spend the hours in prayer in the chapel.

Brother Anthony obtained his own Superior's permission to kneel before the tabernacle. At one o'clock he was interrupted by one of the Sisters. "Brother come quickly. Mother Superior is dead!" He spent the remainder of the night preparing the body for burial.

As he paused to ring the Angelus, one of the Sisters remarked that he must be tired.

"Oh no, sister. Me rest like St. John on the heart of God." Prayer provided life-giving strength for the little Brother's soul.

Three years passed without an opportunity for him to make a retreat. He, of course, made retreats in private, but felt a desperate need to participate in the common spiritual exercises. He began a novena of ten rosaries for ten consecutive Sundays to Bishop de Mazenod with a promise that he would venerate the Bishop as a saint if the favor was granted.

Even with the novena it did not appear to be God's will that the Brother should make the retreat at Lac LaSelle. The Superior ordered him to stay at the

Mission to carry on his work. The final indication that the retreat was out of the question came when Bishop Legal confirmed the Superior's decision.

Seemingly, Brother Anthony's prayers were fruitless. Despite the series of setbacks, he remained confident that God would hear and answer his prayer. The Brother continued the barrage of prayers until the eve of the retreat.

At last through the swirling snows came a message to tell the Brother of the change in plans. In the name of obedience, he must go the forty miles to make the Retreat. Brother Anthony threw up his one good arm in joy. "Me look a lot to see if Brother Alexander would come for me."

He set out as soon as Brother Alexander had a meal and a chance to rest. A little thing like a blizzard could not stop Brother Anthony now. The pair arrived at Lac LaSelle at two o'clock the following morning. Bishop de Mazenod had not overlooked his humble lay-brother.

Day to day living in a pioneer land was filled with hardships and dangers. During one of the trips to the annual retreat, the party had the choice of fording a small river or crossing a makeshift bridge. At the approach to the bridge, the horses bolted, then plunged headlong with the cart into the river.

The two Grey Nuns who had been riding in the front seat were thrown into the swiftly flowing water

and apparently were trapped beneath the cart. Brother Anthony completely disregarded his own safety and waded into the river to rescue the Sisters. He helped them to shore, completely soaked, but unharmed.

Shortly after, Brother Anthony, himself, had a narrow brush with death. While staying at Lake Castor Mission he went fishing with a friend. A north wind suddenly whipped the placid lake into a forest of white-caps. The two were in a boat several miles out. They decided to row for shore rather than risk being swamped by riding out the storm.

The waves buffeted the boat, throwing it back and forth, until finally the angry water hurled it onto the shore. As Brother Anthony freed himself from the thick bush he noticed their catch at his feet. His only comment was, "God is good. He has saved our fish."

The one-armed Brother kept many vigil lights burning before the Blessed Virgin's altar. One day the Superior called him to his room and asked, "Brother, are you certain pride does not prompt you to burn so many candles?"

The Brother was crushed. He pictured the flames as so many sentinels forming an honor-guard around the Heavenly Mother. He wondered how she could be displeased with such a practice. And yet, his Superior has expressed grave doubts. What should he do?

As he mulled over the situation an interior voice told him to go to the Superior and speak up. When

he hesitated, the voice again ordered him to stand firm. If, the voice advised, these reproaches are justified, then God would bless the Mission. If not, then disaster would strike. Brother Anthony feared to speak.

The disaster which the voice had foretold might result, struck St. Paul des Metis during January of 1905. The cry rang throughout the mission.

“The school is on fire!”

A small fire in the basement quickly turned the building into a roaring inferno. The main concern was to save the children. The priests and brothers made a valient effort to fight the fire, but nothing could halt its advance. One small girl was missing, although 89 others escaped without injury. It was learned later that some of the younger students had innocently set the fire, never dreaming it would destroy the school.

The fire was only the beginning. Gradually, the good work done among the Metis and the Indians slowed to a halt. Three or four Sisters were left to carry on, while the remainder moved to other institutions. Eventually, the Mission became a parish composed mostly of white people as the waves of immigration brought thousands of new settlers to the area.

Brother Anthony carried on in his usually quiet and thorough way. He accepted every task offered by his Superior. The following is the way in which the Vicar of the Missions described him.

“He is an excellent Brother, pious, edifying and in many ways greatly surpassing the ordinary. Despite his handicap, Brother Anthony knows how to make himself useful. He performs many duties.”

Brother Anthony continued to care for the pigs, and he continued to light candles before the Blessed Virgin’s statue. His prayers, works and sufferings mounted to God.

Soon, however, his labors in this rugged part of the Lord’s vineyard would be over. Brother Anthony was transferred to Edmonton to assist in the important work of educating the youth of the new country that was awakening to the pulse of progress.

CHAPTER VII


THE SERVICE OF SOULS

Civilization exploded in the West as time turned the corner into the 20th Century. The roar of the steam-locomotive would hardly have drowned out the rumble of the oxcart, when it in turn would be replaced by the scream of the jet-engine to usher in a way of life undreamed of in the early 1900's.

The role of the missionaries was changing. While they still ministered to the wandering Indian bands, they were now faced with serving the spiritual needs of growing settlements as the flood of pioneers edged across the prairies. Eastern Canada and Europe could no longer be depended upon to supply all of the necessary priests and religious. Instead, it was imperative that vocations come from the towns and villages that dotted the West.

The nucleus of a college to train boys, who one day might swell the ranks of those who already had labored long and hard, was established at Pincher Creek in southern Alberta. Father Daridon taught the

boys Latin and other subjects required in their preparation for the priesthood.



By 1906, six boys had enrolled in the new college. Father Daridon realized that a more central location was necessary if the school was to grow and expand to meet the needs of the times. Four years later the boys and their teacher moved to 111th Street in Edmonton. They remained there for a year until the present site of St. John's College was found on the south side of the North Saskatchewan River.

The faculty had grown to five priests and two lay-brothers by the time the 29 boys were settled in their new home. The students were as happy as college boys can be, restricted by regular classes and the light discipline of community living. St. John's gained rapidly in prestige.

October of 1911 was a memorable date in the history of the College, but one that passed with little fanfare. It was the date of Brother Anthony's arrival. Here he would live, performing the humblest task St. John's could offer.

Brother Anthony quickly assumed the tasks he had performed on the mission. He became the blacksmith, furnace stoker, laundryman, gardener, keeper of the chickens and animals, bell-ringer and sacristan. He had made a bargain with God to become a servant. He intended to fulfil that promise completely.

The Brother's day began at five o'clock, well in advance of anyone else in the house. He rose from a warm bed to awaken the community with the familiar greeting of "Benedicamus Domino." However, Brother Anthony had not suffered from an overdose of Latin. His call from slumber usually sounded more like "Becamus Domino."

No matter how the words sounded, no one could have said them with more fervor. Following his tour of the corridors, he went straight to the chapel to begin his day in prayer before the tabernacle. Less fervent souls find meditation difficult at any hour of the day, but early in the morning it is impossible. Not so for Brother Anthony. He removed the dogmas of his faith from the cold theory of the classroom to become every day facts of life.

The morning chapel visit was a source of inspiration and strength that carried him through his long work schedule. Throughout the day he renewed his aspirations hourly with a short visit to the chapel until night prayers ended another segment of total dedication to God. The chapel was his Jacob's well where he satisfied his spiritual thirst.

At the start of the school year, Father Superior assigned each brother his duties in the college. The "Codex Historicus" contains this brief note, "Brother Anthony has been given charge of the heating and water systems."

Despite his patience and extra effort, there was no doubt that Brother Anthony was hampered by the loss of his right hand. Undaunted he fought with the furnace night and day throughout the fiercest cold spells of the winter. The furnace had an insatiable appetite. Brother Anthony was rarely far from its red-hot mouth, struggling with a piece of coal or poking the fire to prod more heat from the dancing flames.

The brother attempted to please everyone, no matter how extraordinary their demands might be. During his first winter at St. John's the mercury dropped to a 33 degrees below zero. The Superior requested him to keep the classroom well heated.

"As you wish," was the Brother's reply. "It is for you to say, me to do."

Unfortunately for Brother Anthony the priest who taught the preceding class was an outdoor type, one who felt that fresh air in large quantities was best for his students. Consequently, he opened the windows and the frigid air rushed into the classroom. When the Superior arrived for his class, he found the room too cold. Word was sent quickly for Brother Anthony to come at once.

"Didn't I tell you at what temperature I wanted this room?"

"Yes," was the only reply.

"Then turn up the heat."

Brother Anthony nodded and returned to his furnace. By the end of the class the thermometer had again raised to a more comfortable reading.

All was well until the original priest returned for a second class only to find the heat unbearable. With a howl he called for Brother Anthony, whom he concluded had obviously gone against his wishes. The tongue lashing proceeded to the point where the brother felt the blood rising in his cheeks. He listened patiently until he was finally dismissed and once again returned to his furnace.

There were embarrassing moments stemming from Brother Anthony's disability; finally, it was decided that a hook was the only answer. The "Codex Historicus" of 1912 records, "Brother Anthony and Father Vicaire left this morning to go shopping for an artificial limb." They returned several days later with the hook.

Brother Anthony's hook — what a marvellous instrument it was! Class after class of college boys marvelled at his ability to put even a piece of steel to the service of God. His grip was literally a grip of steel. Within a few weeks he handled the hook as if he had used it all his life.

The introduction of the new hand brought Brother Anthony more work than ever. Added to his duties as a fireman were those of janitor. It was amusing to see the brother shuffling through the halls with a pail of

water suspended from the now famous hook. He was completely rehabilitated.

The hook gave Brother Anthony new confidence and a new value. He was overjoyed that at last he had two hands with which to serve the Order and the boys.

No one could perform the routine acts of simple drudgery with more enthusiasm and care for detail than the humble brother. It was his job to assist the Sisters in the laundry by boiling the water for the washing, operating the machines and eventually cleaning up. The age of the automatic washer was still many years away and that meant backbreaking work for Brother Anthony. He performed it week after week without a word of complaint.

One wash day the Sisters sent an S.O.S. to Brother Anthony that the laundry door lock was broken. When he found the sisters fretting outside, he asked, "Have you said an Ave?"

"No, Brother."

"You never trust in the Holy Virgin," he chided them.

After a twist of the handle failed to open the door, he dropped to his knees to say an Ave. Another turn of the key opened the stubborn door.

"The blessed Mother has performed a little miracle," he commented laughing at the Sisters. Then,

quite seriously, he added, "If you no trust now in the Holy Virgin, that is very bad."

There were other "little miracles." One bitterly cold winter morning the convent pump was an icy mass, refusing to supply even a thin trickle of water. Brother Anthony responded to a call for assistance by saying a short prayer. Reminiscent of Moses, he struck the pump which immediately poured out water with the working of the handle.

It is not likely that orthodox plumbers would have relied upon Brother Anthony's methods, but he did produce results in an emergency. Again he demonstrated his skilful blending of prayer and plumbing when a tap near the Grotto had a screw lodged in it. The call went out for Brother Anthony when all other methods of removing the screw had failed.

There was the familiar question, "Have you said an Ave?"

The usual answer, "No."

Without another word he dropped to his knees, prayed momentarily, then he tapped the pipe and the screw dropped into his waiting hand. A confrere watching the brother's plumbing exploits jokingly remarked, "You would do better to keep your pipes in order, rather than perform these humbug miracles."

Brother Anthony merely glanced up, a thin smile edging from the corners of his mouth.

Gardening was one of the brother's most important jobs at the college. Once the warm weather arrived, he began immediate preparations for planting the seeds that usually produced a bountiful harvest of vegetables. No child could have received more coddling than did each of the plants in his garden.

When it was obvious that the ordinary working hours did not give Brother Anthony enough time to labor over his vegetables, he requested permission to rise at 4 a.m. It was a familiar sight to see him bent over the rows weeding and watering his plants.

Keeping hungry College boys well fed also meant that Brother Anthony had to care for a number of animals. There was a horse, a cow, a flock of chickens. There were also his old friends the pigs to be fattened up for butchering. It was almost unbelievable, at times, the way in which he supplied the needs of his barnyard companions.

One story is told that Brother Anthony requested the Bursar to buy feed for the hogs because their supply was completely used up. Several days passed. The feed order had slipped the Bursar's mind completely. When he did remember, he naturally assumed that Brother Anthony had made other arrangements.

Brother Anthony told him, "No Father, I did not buy anything. I took a stick and made a mash out of it. The pigs have not complained."

No mother hen could have been more solicitous for her brood than the one-armed brother was for the 300 birds in his care. He anticipated their every need from the time of the tiny birds' incubation until they finally reached the dinner table, a delectable feast for the faculty and students.

Brother Anthony all but lived in the "white house," when the hatch was in progress during the spring. He supervised their strugglings for life as they pecked through the shells. The flock was consigned to the special protection of St. Francis of Assisi, himself a great lover of birds.

Even the Brother's constant vigil was not enough to avert disaster. On the annual clean-up day the students used a strong acid to clean the brass and copper candlesticks and ornaments. The fumes seeped into the chicken coup killing 200 chickens.

Brother Anthony found the floor littered with dead birds. Tears came to his eyes. He fully realized what such a loss meant. With all the patience of Job, he said, "The good Lord permitted this."

One thing characterized Brother Anthony. He was entirely faithful to the humdrum, routine tasks that make life, for less holy people, a round of drudgery to be avoided. He looked for no such escape even when orders were at times seemingly unreasonable. The will of his Superiors was the will of God. No questions

were asked. No explanations were needed, only obedience. So often Brother Anthony merely shrugged his shoulders, then shuffled along the corridor to begin his newest job.

On fine summer evenings when the sun began to dip below the horizon, Brother Anthony hurried to finish his work. He wanted to pay a last visit to the Grotto of Our Lady before dark. His appearance on the college veranda was greeted with a nod from the priests and brothers who already were enjoying the warm night air. He rarely paused to speak but moved quickly to the Grotto to make his thanksgiving.

The Brother often went to the feet of Our Lady's statue to place his burdens and to pray for strength to do God's will no matter what personal sacrifice it might require. He was Mary's slave.

*"Oh Virgin, the day is gone. The earth sleeps.
Now it is the hour of rest. Do not abandon your
child.*

*Place your tender hand upon my eyes, like a good
Mother.*

Close them gently to the things of earth.

*Your servant asks only that he may rise in the
morning,*

*Refreshed and with vigorous steps to shoulder the
sacrifices of the day.*

Place your loving hand upon my heart, to purify its affections.

May it repay our Creator with love everlasting."

The visit usually ended with a tour of the garden to make sure that all was well for the night. St. Joseph seemed to smile from his niche as the brother invoked him from one workman to another, to stand guard during the night, that no harm would come to the precious plants. The brother and the saint made a good team. In twenty years, there was not one crop failure.

Brother Anthony then hurried to his basement room to begin his evening prayers. Quickly he drained from his mind the problems and troubles of the day. All distractions were pushed to one side before he began his spiritual reading.

He loved particularly to taste and savor word by word the Holy Scriptures, interspersing his readings with short prayers. Acts of love for God's great goodness poured from his lips. The simple brother prayed, "Lord, into your hands I commend my soul. I give it to you my God with all the love of my heart, because I love you and because my dependence upon you is so great."

Finally, the blacksmith of God is unable to fight off the sleep that even he must have. Tomorrow is another day which he must face with new and even more trying responsibilities.

If the day to day struggle for perfection can be compared to a road that must be travelled, then Brother Anthony chose a country lane with little or no traffic. His strides, however, were those of a thoroughbred. He manifested his love for God in an eagerness to serve his confreres, the priests of the college and, of course, the boys themselves.

He was always pleased when falling leaves announced the start of another school year. The boys were the centre of his interest, or more correctly, he showed most concern about their vocations. These noisy, fun-loving students were on their way to the priesthood. Brother Anthony felt a duty to ensure that none was sidetracked.

The boys quickly recognized a true friend in Brother Anthony. He was always ready to repair a watch, cut a key, sharpen skates or mend the frame of a short-sighted student's glasses. His service did not end once he had complied with the request of, "Brother would you..."

He comforted new students when the days were loneliest and home a hundred miles away. "You cry to leave your mother?" His smile offered immediate reassurance. "You must persevere. Some day you will be priest."

Brother Anthony's favorite tonic for homesickness was a trip to the chapel for the ailing student. "Say an Ave," he counseled.

Within his breast beat a giant heart overflowing with love for the boys. There was no doubt that preaching and teaching formed no part of his vocation. His apostolate was a simple, direct one. God had decided that Brother Anthony was to have one arm and a hook. He would stoke the furnace, mop the floors, care for the chickens and perform the dozens of other necessary chores that are taken so much for granted. His really important work was to encourage the boys to persevere in their vocations. In this, he excelled.

"You will come back after the holidays," he would tell the boys. "The Blessed Virgin (pointing to her statue near the dining room) will bring you back. She has work for you to do. She will make you an Oblate."

Who could resist the pleadings of someone so determined, especially when his words were backed by powerful prayers? The Brother thought nothing of spending many hours praying for the boys, when he should have been sleeping. Even after the boys had left for the novitiate, Brother Anthony was keenly interested in their progress.

The Superior recognized Brother Anthony's deep insight into their characters. Occasionally, he would ask, "Brother Anthony, what do you think about this young man?"

"He is a good boy."

"And that one?"

A shrug of the shoulders or a nod of the head was all he used to indicate that perhaps, in his opinion, this boy was better suited for another vocation.

Polish boys were Brother Anthony's weak spot. Talking to them carried him back across the ocean to his home in Dzierzanow. They spoke the same language; the same blood coursed through their veins. They shared the same burning love for the Mother of God, so characteristic of the Polish race. His greatest fear was that one such Polish boy would lose his vocation.

"It is better that I should lose another arm," he would say.

He could not help but feel more at ease with the children of his fellow countrymen. From them he regained that indescribable something that everyone loses when he digs up his roots and transplants himself in a new country.

Strange as it may seem, Brother Anthony was vitally interested in world events that shaped the course of history, despite the fact that he was in the world, though not a part of it. The welfare of the Oblate congregation was also high among his concerns.

June 15th, 1917 was a day of joy for Brother Anthony. He watched two of his "boys" kneel before the Bishop to become priests forever. By his inspiration, prayers and sacrifice, he had nudged these two towards their final goal of the priesthood.

Brother Anthony was a simple man but no simpleton. From the first day he arrived at the college, the drabness of the altar was a source of annoyance to him. Patiently, he awaited the right moment to approach the Superior with the suggestion that the white, unfinished boards of the altar be replaced with something more fitting to the eternal sacrifice.

"Perhaps a drive for funds would be the answer," he suggested.

The Superior agreed to let Brother Anthony launch a small drive to pay for the new altar. While Brother Royer was to build the altar, it was Brother Anthony's responsibility to raise the necessary money. He gave each student a letter to send home to his parents.

The letter read in part:

"...It is a poor Oblate of Mary Immaculate, with only one hand, who takes the liberty to write to you. Here is my reason. For the past five years, the Juniorate where I live has had no suitable altar in the chapel. My Superiors have always wanted to build an altar worthy of this college. But many poorer missions have received their attention and any money available.

"Month after month we must use a makeshift altar. I would say that a portion of the infinite merits received through the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice on this new altar will fall as a

blessing on those friends who will have assisted in building it.

“In anticipation of your kindness, you are assured of my prayers and my sincere thanks. In the hope of being favored with a generous response, I remain respectfully yours in Our Lord and Mary Immaculate.”

The plea was enough to open wallets throughout Alberta and in many places beyond. The much-needed money arrived in envelopes of every description.

The rough altar was soon replaced by a finely carved oak altar. The Superior ordered a tabernacle and three pictures from Paris. Brother Anthony made certain that the Blessed Virgin was given her due honor. The pictures were of the Annunciation, the Presentation and the Last Supper.

Work on the new altar was completed in time for the First Vespers of the feast of St. Anthony, June 12th, 1917. Brother Anthony wore a smile that expressed his full approval of the project. The Master, he knew, would also approve.

One last detail was to be taken care of. “Make it beautiful and I will say an Ave for you,” he told the sacristan.

A few days later Brother Anthony hurried to the chapel for an event that was a highlight of his life each time it happened. A former student had returned from the Seminary to say his first Mass.

Brother Anthony prayed that the new priest, "...might be a holy priest." Patiently he waited his turn to receive the blessing. When his turn came, he fell onto his knees with the plea, "Bless me Father."

Thereafter, the young man received all the marks of respect Brother Anthony lavished on priests. For him the priest was a great personage. He always raised his hat in salute to a priest, and was careful never to turn his back on one, so great was his respect for the priesthood.

"You are a priest. You know!" he would say. "Me ignorant. Don't know."

Back he went to his mop and pail, tending his furnace and his garden. The Brother had a good word for everyone. He never turned away without a smile for his visitor and the promise of a prayer. He saw clearly his place in life, to forge the souls of priests — other Christs.

CHAPTER VIII

LIVE AND BE SPENT



Brother Anthony near "his Grotto"



Saint John's College Chapel



Brother

Anthony's

Tomb

Fire had a strange fascination for Brother Anthony. As a boy he used to watch the blacksmith's fire first grow hot, then glow more brilliantly into flickering flames, always hungry for more fuel. Then, when the blacksmith forced the iron into the fire, tongues of flame would curl around the metal which refused to burn. Their licks would finally soften the stubborn iron until it glowed like another red tongue.

Young Anthony never tired of seeing the process repeated. It was a symbol of the action taking place in his soul. Not nearly so stubborn as the iron, he submitted to the searing flames that burned all worldliness from his mind and heart.

According to later accounts, the Sacred Heart in certain visions to Sister Benigna Consolata, said, "My little Benigna, write that the furnace of love is a divine furnace in which I purify, perfect and forge my saints.

As the iron is mellowed by the flames and accepts any shape, so do souls in the fire of my love lend themselves to all types of sanctity.”

When Brother Anthony entered the religious life, he traded masters, but in a sense, not vocations. He was a blacksmith and a blacksmith he remained. He extinguished an earthly fire, but he kindled a spiritual flame. His own life replaced the iron.

Brother Anthony fully realized he must dip his soul into the purifying fire of the love of God. Jesus on the Cross was his model.

Saints do not knock on doors to spread the news of their sanctity. They do not wear halos nor do they stand about posing piously. Their perfection is an interior excellence, not something worn on the sleeve of a jacket like a school crest.

Brother Anthony's journey towards perfection was a life-long struggle. He would be the last to admit that he had reached even the first of the spiritual goals.

The one-armed brother was so ordinary, he was extraordinary. His life was a series of little things well done. It was dull, hidden and completely glamourless. The daily routine he followed year after year was unexciting to the nth degree.

Brother Anthony spoke little and the little he did say was dotted with grammatical errors. “You not work with your tongue. You work with your hands.”

A Laybrother had two things to remember, according to Brother Anthony, to work hard and to pray hard. They must occupy all his time. Despite his apparently complete concentration on the laybrother's dual role, Brother Anthony possessed a fine sense of humor that found expression in small jokes.

Once, while visiting a confrere in hospital, he commented, "Ah, these Poles not very rugged." His left hand raised to cover a faint smile.

One of the effects of Original Sin was to cause our wills to get completely out of hand. Within his Polish frame was a will that was held well under control from early childhood. His soul was the scene of battles of which God alone was a spectator.

Probably his heaviest cross in life was the loss of his right hand. The hook did make a difference, but Brother Anthony felt like a wounded duck caught in a hunter's gunfire. He could not fold his hands in prayer. The hand that was not there was a thorn prodding him on to perfection.

The road to God was certainly no easier for Brother Anthony than for his fellow religious. He once told a friend, "I was glad to get your letter. I regret I cannot answer in Polish. You say the rule is hard. That is true my brother. I am seventy-two. I find the rule difficult. You must bend and break your will."

One of the brother's first actions in the morning was to kneel in prayer, while the rest of the college

slept. "Excuse me, Lord, and you, my Mother. It is me again, to offer my day."

What did he really have to offer? A bell to ring, a furnace to stoke, corridors to sweep, — such simple duties could hardly have any value in the sight of God. Brother Anthony knew how insignificant such jobs were. Yet, when offered to God they received an immeasurable value.

From the crucifix on his wall he seemed to hear the words which Our Lord is said to have spoken in certain visions:

"You have nothing to give me? Then give me your frailties. Your actions are nothing by themselves. If you cast them into the furnace of my love, I will change them into burning coals. I will fill them with my divine love. Offer your actions by writing them into the beats of my heart.

Harmonize your life and your actions with mine so that it no longer is yours but Mine which acts and lives in you. Do only my will in everything you do. Perform these actions with the same generous obedience that was Mine."

Brother Anthony blessed himself and murmured a simple, "Yes."

The Brother was a spiritual squirrel. He was hoarding for eternity. For him, life was a continuous and endless act of faith which transformed the "little

things" he did each day into valuable pieces of gold, ignored by the world around him. He lived for God and God alone.

The clanging of the bell was the voice of God. Suffering was the will of God. To feed the poor was to refresh the Master himself.

A man rapped at the back door of the College one day and asked for a bite to eat. "I am very hungry," he told Brother Anthony. The Brother saw a rare opportunity to serve Christ in person.

"Sister, please bring a tray for this man. Get our best dishes and a fine table cloth!" He treated such callers like visiting royalty. He treated the man with the same respect that Christ himself would have received.

Brother Anthony did not consciously adopt a motto. His life was based, nevertheless, on one sent to him by Bishop Vital Grandin. He wrote to the brother, "Live and wear yourself out for God. Always walk in His presence. He will be your great reward."

Living and wearing oneself out for God means a perfect performance of one's humble duties. Such was the Brother's interpretation. Fidelity was the keynote of his life. He was completely devoted to the Indians, to the college boys, to the furnace and to the garden. Brother Anthony found the secret of life in the love of God.

Unlike St. Paul, St. Francis Xavier or modern day apostles whose work carried them around the world, the one-armed brother confined his apostolate to the college. He spent himself in prayer and in work. In his quest for perfection there was no desire to move mountains.

Strangely enough, his prayers did just that on more than one occasion. The priests and brothers jokingly referred to his "sham miracles." Brother Anthony was well aware that miracles "sham" or otherwise were completely unnecessary to win the battle of perfection.

Brother Anthony was so ordinary in his manner and behavior that he appeared rather dull to the casual observer. There were no false mannerisms crying, "Look at me! I'm well on the way to becoming a saint!"

There were no hairshirts, no iron chains, no revelling in pain, no false piety that makes a serious fault of enjoying even the fragrance of a spring flower. Charity and patience were the main building materials in his castle of perfection.

Charity excuses all, believes all and trusts in God for all things. There is no place for envy, pride or wounded feelings when God's love is a soul's only rule.

Anthony breathed prayers like the rest of mankind breathes air. He prayed in the chapel, in the hallway, in his room. It made no difference where he was. One of his favorite places of prayer was St. Joachim's, Edmonton's first Catholic Church.

He would assist at High Mass in the church on Sunday mornings. The high, narrow stained glass windows showered him with their warm colors as he knelt before the main altar. Long after the congregation had left following the last Mass, Brother Anthony remained to speak with God in the silent beauty of His home.

"Brother Anthony," a voice called softly. The sacristan stood like a mother about to scold. Four o'clock and you are still here! Have you eaten since breakfast?"

"No. But I am not hungry."

"Brother you must eat. Please go to the dining room."

Brother Anthony lived to pray. Eating, for him, was a minor consideration. His need for prayer was like a thirst that could not be quenched; it was a fire no one could extinguish. He would not miss a spiritual exercise or come late for the chapel.

Those who were closest to him did not always understand his perpetual praying. His answer, "With God, one is never lonely."

One incident will illustrate the complete dependence he had on prayer. Among his many duties was the job of sharpening the boy's skates. Brother Anthony was about to begin work on a pair when the grindstone refused to turn. He flicked the switch several times, but the motor was dead, even though a quick examination showed that all was apparently in order.

"Quickly," he told the boy waiting for his skates, "Get on your knees."

The amazed boy sank to the floor. The Brother began, "Ave Maria..." Two Hail Marys and a third partially said was all that was necessary. The whirl of the grindstone drowned out the response.

And then there was the day the college boys were putting on the storm windows. One window refused to fit. Brother Anthony called to the boy, "Come down from the ladder. You not said your prayers this morning." He climbed the ladder with hand and hook holding the window. It fitted without protest.

His devotions were like the rungs of a ladder which he climbed daily, especially devotion to the Sacred Heart, the Blessed Virgin and the saints. The souls in Purgatory, St. Anthony and St. Joseph received special attention.

St. Joseph, of course, was almost a partner. Brother Anthony placed the furnace in winter and the garden in summer under the saint's special patronage.

The Brother prayed often to Bishop de Mazenod, the founder of the Oblats, to whom he owed a great deal.

If it is possible, his prayers intensified during certain periods of the liturgical year. He prayed longer and more fervently in Holy Week. His penances became more rigorous and more demanding.

Serving Mass was Brother Anthony's highest honor. He served daily at least one Mass, often two and even three. Once he took his place at the foot of the altar, nothing would move him. To be so close to the tabernacle during the Divine Sacrifice was a privilege which he cherished greatly.

"Live and spend yourself for God. Always walk in his presence. He will be your great reward."

Was Brother Anthony merely a piece of scrap iron discarded on the junk heap of life? One scratch of the dull finish revealed a towering soul, completely dedicated to God. He was handicapped, lacking in learning, and yet, he did the work of four men, spending himself entirely for the Master.

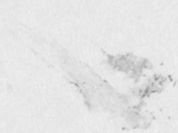
Year after year, Brother Anthony repeated the monotonous tasks of his daily routine. They molded him gradually into the shape of another "Man of God."

CHAPTER IX

ME, A CLOUT!

IN REPLY

TO THE



The prospect of a long year of study and discipline leaves college boys little to celebrate during September. However, one such day St. John's College had every reason to celebrate. Two of its alumni, two of those whom Brother Anthony had dubbed "The Little Ones" were to receive the fullness of the priesthood.

The newly named bishops Routhier and Jordan were returning to their Alma Mater for a visit. The excitement increased when it was announced that Cardinal Villeneuve was also coming. The college would honor the distinguished guests with a banquet.

The grand occasion was, of course, preceded by days of preparation. When at last the distinguished guests sat down at the banquet table, Brother Anthony slipped away to the chapel to pray. As he knelt before the altar he heard the din of conversation and laughter from the dining room.

He was overjoyed to think that two of the former college boys had become Bishops. Certainly, God had blessed St. John's. The high-light of the happy event was the visit of the Cardinal himself.

Brother Anthony's eyes sparkled. "While the Cardinal is here, I must kneel before him, kiss his ring and ask for a blessing. What an opportunity."

The idea slipped away from Brother Anthony as he became completely absorbed in his prayers. While the Brother prayed on, the dinner ended and the College faculty, Brothers and students lined up at the front door to receive the Cardinal's blessing individually.

Brother Anthony came from the chapel to find the hall empty, except for one of his confreres. "Eminence gone?" he asked.

"Yes, brother, the Cardinal left for another reception."

Brother Anthony's heart skipped a beat. Gone! He would never have another opportunity to receive a Cardinal's blessing. "Me a clout. Me unworthy. That is why God not permit me to see Cardinal."

This one remark summarized Brother Anthony's feeling of contempt for himself. Following the example of Sister Benigna Consolata, whose virtues he often studied, he probed deeply into his own character. What were his findings? "Me a clout! Me unworthy!"

St. Bernard defined humility briefly as, "genuine knowledge and contempt for oneself". Brother Anthony's close scrutiny of his own soul revealed its smallness. He believed himself to be an unimportant creature in the sight of God, born with nothing, marked by original sin and always with an inclination to take the easy way.

Brother Anthony's thoughts centred on his complete unworthiness. He kept two books on the table in his room. One was a book of sermons. The other listed points of meditation on the virtue of humility.

The Brother's humility was recognized by others. To one such admirer, he remarked, "Brother Anthony too vain. Always making excuses. That is not good. Please pray for me."

Undoubtedly, Brother Anthony was completely convinced of his own nothingness. But he made no show of false humility. Like the simple violet that mirrors the beauty of God, so the one-armed Brother stood before all men, allowing his God-given gifts to speak for themselves.

His clothing, for example, gave a clear indication of his disregard for material things. Patches were his trademark. The Brother's workclothes — a pair of blue overalls — cause more than one college-boy to gape when he passed by. He wrapped his feet in rags and wore an ancient, three-cornered hat on his head. From the brother's warm smile, one perceived an interior

strength, a peace and gentleness, a reserve possessed by only a few.

St. Bernard rated silence, reserve in laughter and speech, and a controlled manner as signs of true humility. "It is an art to speak properly, but a greater art to know when to remain silent."

LaBruyere once remarked, "True conversation consists in being a good listener rather than in the expression of one's own thoughts."

Brother Anthony made silence his Golden Rule of Life. Far from being a smiling enigma, he was always a good companion for the priests and brothers. But he allowed them to do the talking while he listened. Spinning tales was something he left for others to do. "Me Polish. Me not speak well."

He was anything but a solid, wooden-faced person. When Brother Anthony became the butt of a joke, he was among the first to laugh. He invariably escaped with a plea of ignorance if a confrere attempted to draw him into an argument.

"You theologian," he pleaded. "You know better than me."

He protested quickly when the discussion touched on the relations among the Polish, Germans and Russians. Some would strongly attack the Germans for their treatment of the Polish nation.

"No. The people are good and generous. It is their leaders who are to blame," Brother Anthony invariably told them.

A brief flash of anger caught Brother Anthony off guard when a visitor told him, "The Poles are no good. That's why God punishes them."

"The Polish are good," he thundered back. "It is the Russians who are not good." The words were out. Brother Anthony knelt before the stunned visitor to ask his pardon.

Even the Brother's laughter was moderated. It was never loud nor unbecoming. He attempted to curb every excess. However, there was no rein on his happiness. His beaming face proclaimed it to all he met.

Humility supplies a hidden strength to do and to accept, even with pleasure, tasks that others would strongly rebel against. Brother Anthony drew the insignificant and thankless jobs. Others gladly accepted the more pleasant duties of writing or decorating the altars. He handled the emptying and cleaning of the outhouses.

Even the pigs were the object of his labors. He filled their troughs with nourishing food, prepared from the kitchen garbage. No modern housewife would face the round of drudgery, day after day, that Brother Anthony accepted without complaint.

Everything about Brother Anthony reflected his modesty and poverty. He was content with mended

habit and worn shoes and slept on faded linen. His room was a corner of the basement with bare walls and a cement floor. Its furnishings consisted of a bed and a small wooden table. His one chair had long ago been given to someone who needed it more.

He rarely allowed himself the luxury of a streetcar ride to downtown Edmonton. He would take one ticket and this he often returned to the bursar. Money given to the Brother for votive lights or for Masses was turned in immediately. His wornout purse contained thirty-six cents when he died.

In a vision, Sister Benigna Consalata is said to have heard Our Lord say:

“Where there is humility, I give. Where I find much humility, I give much more. When I find one who lives humbly, desiring nothing but humiliation, such a soul draws me like a lover.

“I would imbue that soul with such hunger and thirst for obedience that it would breathe only by this virtue. This is the precious fruit of love, for obedience is the sister of humility.”

Brother Anthony bent his will to carry out the smallest detail. His obedience approached the heroic. One example of this came during the autumn of 1918, when a windstorm knocked down part of the handball alley wall. To avoid further damage, the college boys rigged several cables to raise the fifty foot wall in one piece.

The engineering feat went well until the massive wall was fifteen feet off the ground. Then, suddenly a hidden obstacle halted the operation. A quick conference decided that someone must crawl under the fence to remove the obstacle before work could continue.

Who would brave the danger? The cables appeared strong enough to hold the wall in place but a slip meant certain death under the enormous weight. The Superior asked Brother Anthony to do the job.

Without a moment's hesitation, the Brother dropped his hat, blessed himself and smiled to the boys like a lion-tamer entering the lions' cage. He crawled underneath the fence, The color slowly drained from the onlookers' faces when the wall quivered slightly, but the cables held fast.

After what seemed eternity, Brother Anthony crawled out from under the wall. The tension eased quickly and the boys and priests roared their approval!

On another occasion when Brother Anthony was burning grass in a high wind, a confrere questioned his action. "What are you doing?" he asked.

"Father Superior ordered me to burn the grass in the yard and along the ravine," was the reply.

"But Brother, can't you see that the fire could easily jump the road and threaten the college."

"That true, but Father Superior ordered me to burn the grass. He knows how the wind blow and how dry the grass is."

The general alarm sounded an hour later. Clouds of smoke swirled across the yard as the wind blew the flames towards the road. The boys used shovels, sacks and even old clothing to beat out the flames. Within another hour they had succeeded in putting out the fire.

“Well, Brother, what did I tell you?”

Brother Anthony nodded. “Yes, I know,” he said. He did not attempt to make excuses. There was no reason in his mind to question his Superior’s orders. He must obey. Divine Providence and the Blessed Mother would look after the rest.

A piece of iron in a blacksmith’s hands can be transformed into a useful tool or even a work of art. He bends and beats the iron, plunges it into the fire and cools it in water before it has completed its transformation.

Brother Anthony was a piece of iron in the hands of the Divine Blacksmith. The Brother’s will was bent and beaten into subjection by the hammer of discipline. Who could know how great was the interior struggle for a so sensitive and quick-tempered a person at a cutting remark or a joke carried too far?

Such a test came for Brother Anthony one autumn day while a group of boys were working with him to prepare the vegetables for winter storage. Another group was nearby setting up the rink boards. No two groups such as these could work side by side for long

without a pitched battle, expecially when they were adequately supplied with missiles.

The taunt: — “Hey, look at the potato sack gang,” was enough to prompt a well aimed potato in retaliation and the fight was under way. The boys pushed and wrestled, while others hurled vegetables until the whole situation was completely out of hand. All work had stopped and the damage toll mounted. Finally, Brother Anthony asked the Prefect of Discipline to restore order.

“Of course Brother, I will see to it right away.”

The battle scene was quiet until the following day when hostilities again broke out during the work period. Apparently the Prefect had forgotten about Brother Anthony’s complaint. The culprits had escaped without so much as a reprimand.

Brother Anthony did not intend to witness a repeat performance. He marched into the Prefect’s office to present his case in stronger terms. He talked quickly and with plenty of feeling in his voice. Then without waiting for a reply, he turned and walked out of the room.

The Brother was missing from Night Prayers that evening, a thing that had happened only rarely during his many years at the College. Another Brother checked his room to find Brother Anthony seated on his bed, seemingly dazed. He appeared to have lost his memory through an emotional upset or a physical attack.

Brother Anthony spent three days in hospital before returning to his normal duties. Among his first actions when he returned to the College was to kneel before the Prefect and to ask his pardon for the earlier outburst.

The Brother's usual reply to an order that seemed slightly ridiculous was, "That good, Father. You to say, me to do." He fought back every inclination to anger when he was scolded by his Superiors. His most violent reaction was a shrug of the shoulders.

While working in the laundry with a young, rather dimwitted companion, Brother Anthony bent over a tub to remove the clothes. Spotting the Brother, the youth grabbed his legs and pushed Brother Anthony into the tub. He replaced the cover and turned on the machine. The Brother freed himself moments later, badly shaken up, but otherwise unharmed.

An ordinary person would likely have impressed the lad with the seriousness of his action by using the flat of his hand. Strong words were, at the least called for. But Brother Anthony's only rebuke was, "You not do that, that not right."

Later, when he was questioned about the incident, Brother Anthony excused the boy, "He not too bright. Not responsible."

During a spiritual lecture to the Sisters who cooked the meals at the college, the Superior asked if they

wished to see a perfect model of a humble religious. "Just a moment," he said.

He rang the bell to summon Brother Anthony. Moments later, the religious stood in the doorway, wearing his faded overalls and carrying the strange, three-cornered hat. Before he could speak, the Superior barked, "Well, what do you want?"

"I thought you rang for me, Father."

"Get back to your work and stop wasting time."

The Brother apologized and left, apparently undisturbed by the humiliation.

Brother Anthony's humility was no synonym for indifference or carelessness. He accepted all such incidents as coming from God. His life was a victory of grace over nature. He forced himself to become mild, modest and easily approachable. The saintly Blacksmith had forged his iron into a masterpiece!

CHAPTER X

AT THE FOOT
OF THE CROSS

At Bishop Legal's request, Brother Anthony accompanied him on a confirmation tour to drive the wagon and to assist him whenever possible. The primitive trail was strewn with rocks and stumps. The wagon bumped and shook, jolting its passengers unmercifully.

Bishop Legal spotted a deep hole in the road and, in fun, he called to the Brother, "There's a hole. Try not to miss it."

"Monseigneur," came back the Brother's answer, "We all have crosses to carry. You have yours and I have mine, which I drag as best I can across stumps and mudholes for the Glory of God!"

The wagon clattered along in silence for the remainder of the way.

Far from dragging his cross throughout life, Brother Anthony accepted it generously and carried it

graciously. He must have read often the words of St. Paul, "I perfect in my flesh, that which it lacks of the sufferings of Jesus Christ, for its body, which is the Church."

Brother Anthony wrapped his physical sufferings in a shroud of silence. He suffered the illnesses, the cold, the sleepless nights and the tiresome days without a complaint. He even refused to have a hand injury treated, pleading, "It is nothing. It won't kill me. I sin a lot. I must make sacrifices because Jesus died for me."

At another time when he suffered a bad case of flu, he ignored advice to take better care of himself. "If religious not want to make sacrifices and not pleased to be sick, that not good."

During a particularly bitter winter, when the mercury had remained below zero for many days, he received an emergency call from the superior to unclog the sewer pipes. He had every right to suggest that someone else attempt the job, because of the severe rheumatic attacks he was suffering. In spite of the pain he accepted the order and went to work.

He probed the icy waters almost continually for three days. Finally, the blockage was removed and the sewer flowed freely again. Only then did Brother Anthony go to bed. Gnawing pains wracked his weary body. He lay for hours, his nerves as taut as steel, until soothing sleep brought a respite from the pain.

The following morning Brother Anthony appeared in the chapel as usual. He said nothing of the pain he was enduring. Each genuflection caused even more pain. Rather than hint to anyone that he was ill, he scrubbed the chapel floor on his hands and knees.

The pain became more intense, his steps slower and more feeble. It became noticeable that Brother Anthony was a sick man. A confrere asked him, "Could I help you? You seem so ill."

There was no answer. Brother Anthony sat down and removed his shoes. His companion was alarmed at the sight of feet that were severely cyanosed and swollen. The priest and brothers were shocked when they heard of the suffering Brother Anthony had endured. It failed to draw a word of complaint from him.

One morning a student walked into the laundry and found Brother Anthony unconscious in a pool of blood on the cement floor. He had been working alone and had fallen from a step-ladder. The same accident happened again several years later, when he fell from the ladder while oiling one of the machines.

This time the report read, "broken ribs, crippled arm broken." Brother Anthony so welcomed the newest cross of suffering that he almost revelled in the pain.

Kneeling was as natural as standing or walking to Brother Anthony. He knelt before the small table

in his room to do his spiritual reading. A chair was a luxury he dispensed with early in his years at St. John's. The few letters he wrote were dictated to one of the priests while the Brother knelt at his side.

The one-armed brother is best remembered kneeling beside the pillar in the College Chapel. That was his place where he passed uncounted hours in prayer.

Also worthy of note was Brother Anthony's conduct at the dinner table. He never ate more than was absolutely necessary to maintain his strength. He hid his mortifications with small tricks. When a bowl of fruit was passed, Brother Anthony invariably managed to choose the smallest for himself. Dessert was left untouched.

Often, he would eat quickly in order to pour the coffee or pick up the plates. On feast days when the meals took on a festive air, Brother Anthony's appetite waned noticeably. Even as he grew older and was exempt from the rules of fasting, the little Brother continued to deny himself. Special dispensations to eat meat were fine for other people, but not for Brother Anthony.

Such a dispensation was allowed when he was at St. Paul des Metis. When told he could eat meat during a trip to the lumber camp, Brother Anthony replied, "Why eat meat when the good God placed us beside a lake filled with fish?"

Pope Pius IX said, "Give me a religious who observes his rule perfectly and I will canonize him!"

Dying a martyr's death is simple compared to the slow death of submitting with monotonous regularity to a life of performing the "little things" that every Laybrother is called upon to do. Dying to oneself is the road that leads to God.

Brother Anthony saw the Holy Rules as signposts directing the way on the roughest of roads. He put himself into high gear for a journey that continued for more than 80 years. The natural conflict of loves was even more difficult to overcome than the poverty, silence and other requirements of the rule.

He had renounced the natural attachment of a son to its parents and homeland. The choice of the religious life in a foreign land with no hope of ever seeing his mother and father again in this world weighed heavily upon his heart. The loss of a hand and the subsequent thought of living the remainder of his life as a miserable cripple, scourged Brother Anthony's soul.

A sharp-tongued Superior who completely misunderstood him had added still another burden which he carried without a murmur. This Superior had ordered Brother Anthony to do many difficult tasks. Often he had soundly rebuked and humiliated the silent Brother. Always the reaction was the same. His

meekness and endless patience conquered all difficulties.

“Me make sacrifice, Jesus died for me.” The three month period during which Brother Anthony had been forbidden to receive Holy Communion was among the greatest sacrifices of his life. He bore it meekly, leaving all to the will of God.

Despite his lack of formal education Brother Anthony was well versed in the principles of spiritual life. He made use of his minimum of theoretical knowledge and like any good tradesman became proficient through daily practice. There was no danger of his making mortification an end in itself. He regulated everything with prudence and obedience.

“Me ignorant. Me not know. You theologian. You know.” Such was the Brother’s plea. Such a teacher as he was, is rarely to be found.

Almost all that is known of Brother Anthony was learned from those who lived with him. He spoke so little of his inner feeling that his silence rivals that of St. Joseph. His poor grasp of English hindered his expression, but it is doubtful that he would have said more even if his speech had been fluent.

The few brief words spoken by Brother Anthony from day to day, plus his regularly practiced devotions demonstrated how completely the Eucharist, the Sacred Heart, the Passion and special devotions to the suffering souls had become the centre of his spiritual life.

With special permission Brother Anthony would remain in the chapel long after the others had gone to bed. ✓ He would drag himself from one Station of the Cross to another in the dim flickering light of a few vigil lamps.

His rheumatism, coupled with the fatigue of the day's labor, made each genuflection a battle as he grew older. Each day his soul climbed the hill of Calvary as he made expiation for his own sins and those of the world.

Brother Anthony was one of those souls who seem destined to suffer greatly in this life. During Holy Week he re-lived the drama of the Divine Passion with great earnestness and sorrow. The stripping of the altars, the veiled statues and the open tabernacle door had a profound effect upon him.

Holy Thursday was a day of triumph. Brother Anthony spent long hours before the Repository, pouring out his thanks to God for the great gift of the Eucharist. He then felt a closeness to the Divine Master equalled on few other occasions during the liturgical year.

Good Friday dawned drab and dark. The joy of the previous day's events had disappeared in the screams of the mob demanding the blood of the innocent Christ.

“Behold the Cross, banner of the approaching King.”

Loneliness and emptiness gripped Brother Anthony's heart. The Master was dead. He would have gladly offered himself to die with his Lord. Only a direct order from the superior prevented Anthony from a complete fast for the day.

For Brother Anthony the cross was more than a symbol. It was his beacon, his model, his only hope.

CHAPTER XI

BROTHER AVE

Kneeling before the miraculous image of the Blessed Mother in his village church at Lutogniew, young Anthony Kowalczyk had an important decision to make. Would he follow his conscience and leave behind all he loved dearly? It was difficult to say goodbye forever to his family and friends. The thought that hurt most was leaving his mother.

He had prayed almost constantly for the past three days for the strength to follow his vocation. Now only the Blessed Mother could soothe the aching heart. Anthony knew deep in his heart that he must turn his back on all he loved.

"Yes, I want to love you and your Son," he prayed. "But must I leave my mother; must I leave her forever?"

Twice he seemed to hear the Madonna answer, "If you do not abandon everything, if you love your mother more than you love me, you will die alone."

Anthony's head dropped. He covered his tear-streaked face with his hands. Then, facing the image squarely, he said: — "I will go."

From that moment on he was never alone at the foot of the cross. A heavenly mother assumed the protective role his earthly mother had played so well. Anthony belonged to Mary, heart and soul.

Of the many religious orders Brother Anthony could have chosen, he was attracted by a congregation dedicated to Mary — The Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. This was to be his passport to heaven and the realization of a life long ambition. He had wanted to exile himself to the farthest corner of the earth in the service of God's poorest, most abandoned souls.

"What is an Oblate," he asked himself, "but an offering and a voluntary victim." Brother Anthony smiled warmly when he heard the words, "Sons of Mary." In the Oblates he had found a religious family whose very name, spirit and exploits were pledged to the Blessed Virgin. He had found his vocation.

The Oblates have preached the gospel in many languages and to many races under Mary's blue sky. They are immediately recognized by their tender and faithful devotion to the Blessed Mother.

Bishop de Mazenod, the founder of the Oblates, dictated for his followers the law of love for Mary.

“Devotion to the Blessed Virgin must surpass all others.” As the Oblate Cross cast its shadow on the steaming tropics and across the frozen wastes of North America, the Bishop’s command was obeyed.

Shrines sprang up everywhere as visible signs of their deep, interior devotion. Even a grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes was built above the Arctic Circle at Lettie Harbor to testify to the missionaries’ love for their Mother.

With his acceptance as an Oblate and a “Son of Mary” Brother Anthony had now cleared the first hurdle in the pursuit of the distant state of sanctity. Even without the grace of a vocation, he was naturally inclined towards obedience and prayer. Above all things else, he was a devotee of the Blessed Virgin.

The flame of Brother Anthony’s love for his Mother burned steadily at her feet without a flicker. Such devotion to Mary was a natural result of her role in man’s redemption. Mary, the Mediatrix of all Graces, Mother of all mankind, deserved the highest honor. Brother Anthony paid her that honor. The name ‘Mary’ is the story of this brother’s life.

For Brother Anthony the Hail Mary was a universal language that he spoke with great eloquence. He used the Ave as a greeting. Even his monetary system was based upon the Hail Mary. One or more Aves was his price for a service rendered. “When you thank me I am not made richer. Better say an Ave for me.”

From a spiritual stand point Brother Anthony was one of the world's richest men. He spent his riches with reckless abandon. As a gambler might throw down a thousand dollars on a card table or back a long-shot at the race track, so Brother Anthony often tossed a thousand Aves into play.

He was asked many times to pray for dangerously sick people. A thousand Aves was his standard gift to a newly-ordained priest. His Superiors requested special prayers whenever difficult decisions had to be made.

The Hail Mary was the Brother's cure for every ill, physical and spiritual. It served as an instrument to repair machinery, a master key for the broken lock, a remedy for the body and a balm for the heart. He whispered Aves from morning until night, not as a routine devotion, but rather, as the outpouring of a deeply rooted love.

Brother Anthony took Our Lord's counsel seriously to heart that we must become as little children. Like a little child he lived constantly in the presence of his heavenly Mother. Each of her feasts was an occasion for special joy.

His happiness was more apparent than usual one 8th of December as he strolled across the College campus. "Say Brother, what's going on? You seem happier than ever this morning," a young student inquired.

"Why, of course. This is the feast of the Blessed Mother."

When a student approached him with a difficult problem to solve, the Brother asked the boy one simple question. "Did you pray to the Virgin?"

"I did not think to ask her help."

"What? You no tell that to your Mother! How you expect her to help you?"

Brother Anthony had an unshakeable faith in the Blessed Virgin. So strong was it that when a confrere jokingly complained that his prayers had gone unanswered, the brother said, "Tut, tut. The Blessed Virgin always answers. You do not pray right."

One of the College professors told Brother Anthony that Mary did not seem disposed to listen to his prayers. The Brother was amazed. He protested mildly, "Please Father, don't say that. The Blessed Mother is good."

His devotion to Mary was a burning fire that warmed every action. His prayers and words were enflamed with her love. It was a familiar sight to see the Brother with a rosary gripped tightly in his hand, like a chain binding him to the Blessed Mother.

One of his first actions each morning was to salute Mary with an Ave. Throughout the day, as he stoked the furnace, emptied the laundry tubs or weeded the

garden, Mary was always at his side. He turned to her instinctively whenever a problem arose.

Devotion to Mary was engraved on Brother Anthony's heart. It was simple and direct. Whenever he passed a statue of the Blessed Virgin, he would bow, say a short prayer and then back away.

Burning votive lights before her statues was one of his favorite ways of paying honor to Mary. He carefully watched for every opportunity to collect a few pennies to buy additional candles.

"It's for the good Mother, to honor her," he explained.

A certain tension charged the atmosphere of the college at examination time. Brother Anthony was not immune to it. He redoubled his prayers for the boys' success. Mary's altar blazed with lights as the Brother stormed heaven for those who should have studied more and played less during the school year.

As might be expected, Brother Anthony's devotion sought a permanent shrine to honor the Mother of God. He decided to build a Grotto, depicting the apparitions at Lourdes. He chose a corner of the college garden near the main entrance as the site. The Superior was much in favor of the grotto, but he impressed upon the Brother the fact that it would cost money.

"Are you willing to collect the necessary money?"

A smile flooded the aging Brother's face. "Yes, yes. That good. The Virgin will be happy."

The work began. Brother Anthony organized a search of the nearby ravines and fields for suitable rocks. Once the basic building materials had been collected, Brother Anthony faced the problem of getting enough money to purchase the rest. He decided to send a letter to former students, friends or anyone he thought who might donate to Our Lady's shrine. To an alumnus, he wrote, "I have not had the courage to write to you for money for the Grotto. Today, I believe it is my duty. I am fulfilling my vow of obedience."

With the same enthusiasm exuded by every good salesman, he approached visitors to the college. His technique was simple but highly effective. Brother Anthony would quietly join a group busily passing pleasantries with the visitor. While he listened, he would size up his prospect, awaiting the psychological moment. When the time was right, he would ask, "You generous? You like the Blessed Mother? You give for the Grotto."

He impatiently awaited the verdict. At times the donors jokingly questioned the practicability of the project. Brother Anthony would smile broadly. He was sure of another donation.

The completion of the Grotto was an occasion for great rejoicing for the college and in particular for the simple Brother. But great as was the joy that flooded his heart at the sight of Our Lady's shrine,

another event flooded Brother Anthony's soul with even greater happiness.

The years were ebbing away quickly for him. He wished to dedicate himself formally to Mary. Months of preparation preceded his solemn offering of himself on the feast of the Assumption, four years before his death. Using the words of Blessed Grignon de Montfort, Brother Anthony proclaimed his dedication.

"I choose you today in the presence of all the celestial court, for my mother and my teacher. I surrender to you my body and soul, my rights — interior and exterior, the worth of my good actions — past, present and future, allowing you the entire and full right to dispose of me and all that belongs to me without exception, according to your pleasure and the greater glory of God, through all time and eternity."

So, Brother Anthony approached the end of the winding road he had paved with a million Aves. Mary was his constant companion. He spread her devotion to everyone he met. The good Brother was completely and forever, her slave.

CHAPTER XII

THE NIGHT FALLS

The shadows lengthened for Brother Anthony. He was in the twilight of life when the eyes no longer form sharp images, the memory plays tricks and the strength ebbs from the once-robust body. He was even confined to his bed for short periods. The strong flame that burned so brightly at the Blessed Virgin's feet was flickering and slowly dying.

The thought of death held no terror for him. He beamed when friends visited his hospital room. Instinctively, his good hand was extended in welcome, the rosary wrapped around the fingers. His Oblate Cross rested beside him.

"Father, me can't work no more. Pray for me to die right. Say Aves."

But Brother Anthony was not going to say farewell just yet. He rallied sufficiently to return to the College. The Bursar moved him to a room near the chapel so that he might spend his final days close to

the altar. Even with this consideration, Brother Anthony was uneasy. At last he told the Bursar, "Me not work. Me cost money to the Oblates."

So restless was Brother Anthony to continue working for the good of the College that the Bursar returned him to his former room and restored him, at least in part, to his former duties. Brother Anthony was happy again, decked out in his old overalls. What a relief to be working for others and not sitting about like an old man!

As willing as Brother Anthony was, his indomitable spirit could not overcome failing health. "Father, what time is it? Is it time for prayers?" He haunted the corridors, often appearing in chapel for a religious exercise at the wrong time, although no time was wrong for Brother Anthony to be in chapel. The well worn beads threaded through his fingers again and again.

In spite of a life spent in the background, in spite of his silence and his concern for doing "little things," Brother Anthony was famous throughout the Oblate world. His half century of dedication had not gone unnoticed.

When Brother Anthony was fifty-nine years old, the Provincial of the Polish Oblates attempted to have him returned to his native Poland. "Could we have Brother Anthony for our Province? We have only a few Laybrothers. This brother would be a tradition, a dynamic example for our younger Brothers."

The Provincial even took his request to the Superior-General in Rome. He wrote, "Owing to his age and infirmity, we do not expect him to work. Rather, we are counting on his prayers and the influence he would exert on our younger Brothers by his piety and attachment to his vocation and the Congregation. He would also be re-united to his family after thirty years in the Canadian missions."

Pressures also grew within the order to move Brother Anthony to other Provinces in Canada. Two years later the German and Polish Fathers in Regina requested his transfer to their Province. But there was no letting Brother Anthony go. While the temptation to return to Poland must have been strong, the Brother decided to spend the remainder of his life in Canada.

December 13th, 1942 was obviously a feast day at St. John's College. The boys had been scurrying about for days making preparations for an evening concert. The sound of young voices chanting the Kyrie and Gloria floated along the corridors as the singing was polished and perfected.

One person took little or no notice of what was happening. This, of course, was Brother Anthony. He was busy with a dozen tasks. He did remember that the 13th marked his 50th Anniversary as a Laybrother. He was certain that no one else would remember. How wrong could the little Brother be!

The day began with a beautifully-sung Mass of Thanksgiving. Hands grasped for his from every side to wish him well. Brother Anthony was overcome by this show of kindness. He was deeply grateful, but why the fuss over him? After all, he was the "clout" of the community!

The tributes mounted during the day, causing him increasing uneasiness and genuine embarrassment. That evening he sat in the place of honor at the concert. He tried to smile when the compliments showered upon him, but he blushed during most of the evening. The event was slow torture for him.

Certainly, no one priest or brother more richly deserved the honor than Brother Anthony. For thirty years he had been a pillar of the College, and a loyal friend to all who passed through its doors. This is how an alumnus described the Brother's influence.

"This child of God and of the Virgin Mary, in his humble simplicity, has woven without interruption the threads of our lives. Always he drew us closer to God. Brother Anthony has been our living example. To see his devotion and close union with Jesus and Mary has made it easier for us to pray and to imitate that devotion.

"Above all, his great admiration for the priesthood was an encouragement and an inspiration. We never had a better friend. His ever persevering prayers have followed us down the road of life."

Brother Anthony was a happy man when he went to bed that night, although his feelings were mixed. He breathed a strong sigh of relief. Now he would return to the quiet and solitude of the life he had known for 50 years!

No one can ever say whether Brother Anthony experienced visions or ecstasies. Such gifts are not integral parts of sanctity, although they may accompany it. He hinted at times of special graces. At major turning points in his life he heard voices.

"Go to Mulheim... If you do not leave your mother... Tell your Superior..." Little more is known, for Brother Anthony carefully avoided any mention of such things.

One thing seems certain. Towards the end of his life, Brother Anthony was badly beaten by an unknown assailant. The incident occurred in his room and developed into a night of terror.

The first sign that anything was wrong came the following morning when the Brother was missing from his place in the chapel. The date was September 17th, 1945. He did not appear in the hall, sweeping or dusting. He was absent from all the religious exercises. When the Brother did not come to the table for dinner, a confrere hurried to his room.

"Brother Anthony, are you there?" He rapped sharply several times, without any answer. He burst

into the room to find Brother Anthony sitting on the edge of the bed. His face was bruised and swollen, his eyes blackened and bloodshot.

“What has happened Brother Anthony?”

He mumbled a few incoherent words in reply.

A second brother made him lie down and ran for help. Brother Anthony was rushed to hospital. His condition appeared serious enough to require the Last Sacraments.

Within a few days he began to rally and was soon out of danger. The one person he asked for was a Polish woman who lived in Edmonton and had a son studying for the priesthood. Because of the boy, Brother Anthony had taken a special interest in the family.

She entered the room, standing for a moment at the foot of the bed. She did not speak.

“Pray for me mother, I am so poor,” he begged.

“Why, Brother, you are not poor. Who beat up on you? Have you any enemies?”

The woman was amazed at Brother Anthony’s condition. She hardly recognized the bruised and disfigured face as that of the once smiling Brother.

“No, Mother. I have no enemies.”

“But someone must have done this to you.”

"I don't know who," he told her. "It was after Night Prayers. I think it was the Devil. He fought with me all night."

"Why didn't you call out?"

"I couldn't."

The night of terror haunted Brother Anthony for many days after his return to the College. He was not afraid that the beating would be repeated, but rather, that his secret would be discovered. More than once he asked the Brother who slept in the room next to his, "You know what happened?"

When he shook his head Brother Anthony smiled. His secret was safe. The beating resulted in more than bruises. The Brother's memory failed him more often. He was nervous and upset. He knew that death was quickly approaching.

The thought of death caused no concern for him. After all, it was a deliverance, a veil torn away. Soon he would cross into eternity, there to exchange his cross for the joy of heaven.

"Me old. This my last year. When you return, my friend, I not be here."

The College boys went home in June and the summer quiet descended upon the halls of learning. Soon afterwards, the priests and brothers prepared to

make the Annual Retreat. Brother Anthony was eighty-one and certainly was not expected to make the Retreat, but nothing could prevent his going.

His last afternoon at the College was spent on his hands and knees in the garden pulling weeds. In spite of his age and growing weakness, he knelt in the hot sun to perform this final chore. "This is my last Retreat," he confided to a few.

The sky was blue and cloudless when Brother Anthony left for St. Albert. The lush grainfields promised a bumper crop. The Brother dreamed of another harvest as the car rolled along the highway to the famous missionary centre.

He wondered about his own soul and whether he would have a "bumper crop" to present when death nudged him into eternity.

The mission buildings came into view on top of the hill. How Brother Anthony loved St. Albert. It was the home of the West's first apostles. He remembered so well Father Lacombe and Bishop Grandin. Here he had once dedicated himself to the work of the Lord's vineyard for the remainder of his life.

Every retreat he had made at St. Albert was important for Brother Anthony. This retreat, he felt would be his last and all-important. The Master would come. Brother Anthony had nothing to fear. He was always ready.

For the first two days the Retreat-Master preached on the Four Last Things. He spoke at some length on Death. Brother Anthony listened carefully and meditated for many hours before the tabernacle. His face shone with the joy that a weary traveller knows when his long journey is almost completed.

Brother Anthony did not appear at the dinner table on the following Sunday. His confreres found him lying on his bed, fully clothed, paralyzed and unable to speak. Everyone knew that Brother Anthony could not cheat death this time.

Even though his body was paralyzed, Brother Anthony still gripped his rosary. He received his Divine Master in Holy Communion and he was anointed.

"Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit. I give Thee my soul, because I love Thee with all my heart. Because I love Thee, I feel the need to place myself into thy limitless hands. I have complete confidence in Thee. Thou art my Father."

Undoubtedly, Brother Anthony's life passed in review before his eyes during the last hours. He saw himself home in Poland, a small boy, enjoying the adventures and excitement that belong to youth. He saw Anthony, the young man, leaving home to work in the steel plants of Hamburg. He again heard God's call to join the Oblates and sacrifice all. His total dedication, his life of sacrifice had brought him to the Canadian West to live, and now to die.

Brother Anthony did not feel that death was approaching to claim him as a victim; rather, he believed that life was waiting to escort him to his heavenly home. His Blessed Mother was at his side. Her outstretched arms were ready to receive him.

The Brother tenderly kissed his Oblate Cross. A few moments later his suffering ended.

Brother Anthony was dead.

Simple in life, he was even simpler in death. Almost a hundred priests, laybrothers, sisters, former students and friends gathered in the college chapel to pay their last respects. There were no tears, for death had not won a victory.

Brother Anthony made a second trip to St. Albert that summer. His cares had vanished, to be replaced by a peace, final and complete. The silent procession moved between the rows of graves. Only the sound of feet on the gravel path broke the stillness of the hot afternoon. Priests and brothers stood at the edge of the grave as the coffin sank into its final resting-place.

They said goodbye to the "little man" who was "big" in the eyes of God. Brother Anthony's exile was ended.

The Blacksmith of God was home at last.

EPILOGUE

Like her divine Founder, the Church takes pride in glorifying the humble. "Et exaltavit humiles." According to Her, it is not what appears to the wordly eyes that counts, but only supernatural and beautiful inner life lived by all saints. Therefore her motherly love favors the modest, the humble. These souls of great merit are exalted by the Church and placed on the altars so that all may try to imitate their virtuous life.

Although a relatively young Congregation, the Oblates of Mary Immaculate are proud of their several members who strove to attain perfection: Bishop de Mazenod; two Bishops missionaries of the West, Bishop Grandin and Bishop Charlebois; two other apostles, Father Albini and Gérard. Their causes of beatification have been introduced in Rome.

On April 7, 1952, Reverend Father Giuseppe Morabito, O.M.I., postulator, arrived in Edmonton to

plan the necessary steps in connection with Brother Anthony Kowalczyk's cause. A diocesan tribunal was then formed.

The opening session of the diocesan cause took place on April 14 at the Episcopal Palace. Archbishop J.H. MacDonald presided. The tribunal was then moved to St. John's College where all other sessions were held. Forty-four witnesses testified. Among those present, a bishop, The Most Reverend Henri Routhier, O.M.I., priests, religious, laymen, former pupils, superiors, fellow workers, etc... Some had known Brother Anthony during his life at the College, others during his missionary career in St. Paul or Lac la Biche. Also present was Brother Schumaker a fellow novice from Saint-Gerlach, Holland, in 1891.

Less than five years had elapsed since the death of the humble lay Brother when the first steps toward his glorification were taken. This is not at all surprising. As far as can be recalled, Brother Anthony's reputation surpassed all others. This is the unanimous and solemn testimony of all who knew him.

Shortly after his death, the sincere admiration of his friends spontaneously changed to fervent prayer. Numerous favours are attributed to his intercession. Now his reputation of holiness continued to spread far and wide.

On June 13th 1952, during their 63th session, the members of the tribunal received the testimony of the

last witness. A few weeks later the first canonical cause was officially adjourned. What will result of those undertakings? The answer rests in Rome.

Eventually, the Church will submit to a serious examination all the testimonies concerning Brother Anthony together with the countless graces credited to his intercession. Moreover, the whole life of the humble religious will undergo a critical and detailed analysis. For true holiness is not necessarily accompanied by miracles, ecstasies or revelations; rather, it consists in a constant practice of all virtues to an heroic degree.

This was Brother Anthony's unique purpose. Under his unassuming appearance were hidden countless treasures of virtue.

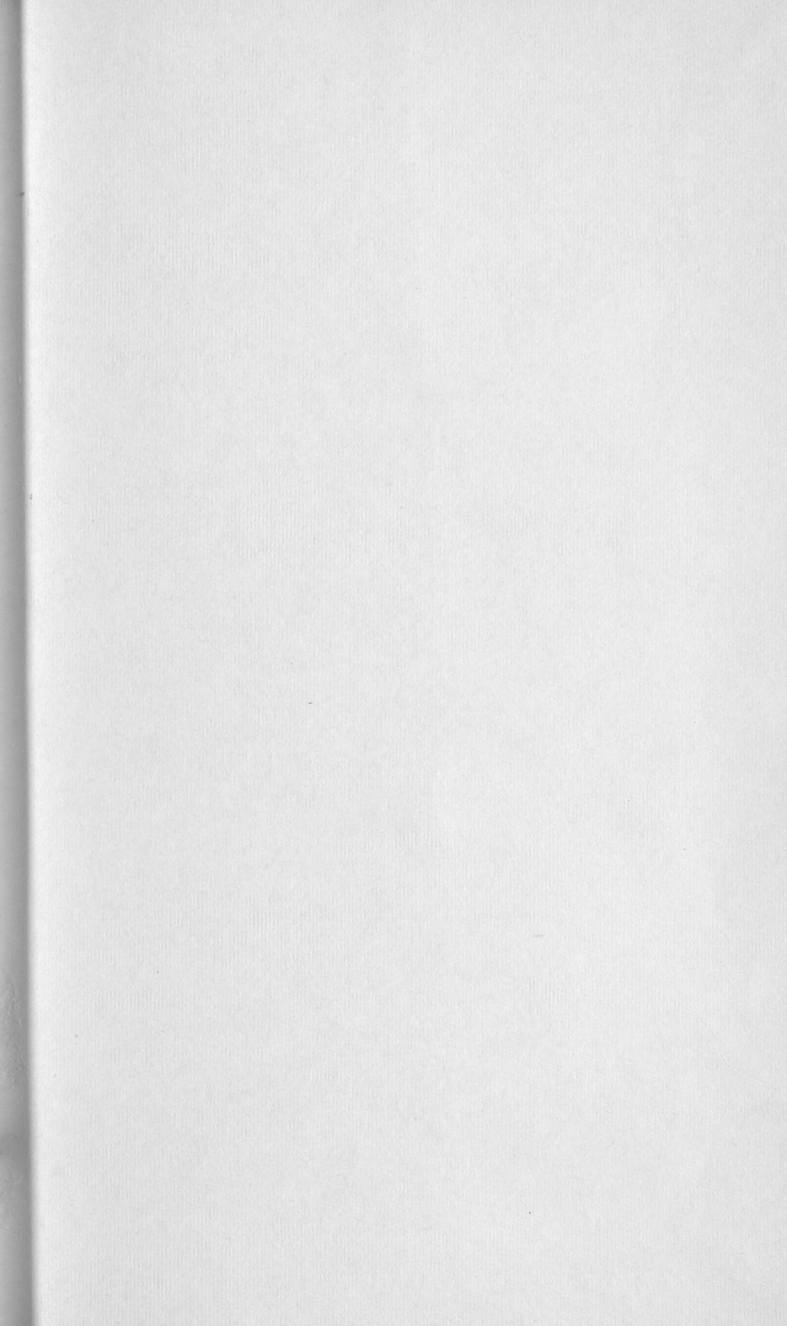
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